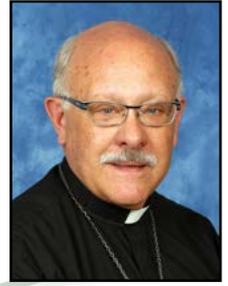




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

The Birth of Jesus Christmas Eve Family Service

December 24, 2016

4:00 pm

Reflecting on the Light

Merry Christmas! At the end of our Advent days of preparations, the assurance that most of what we share this night is about the same as it has been for generations.

Matthew and Luke are similar...let's see how much you remember: the parents are Mary and JOSEPH; he was a descendent of DAVID; Jesus was born in BETHLEHEM, but his family settled in NAZARETH. That is the essential part of the story in those two gospels. They do not have in common Joseph's resolve to divorce Mary, the angelic instruction to name him "Jesus," the Magi who bring gifts; the family escaping to Egypt, Mary's son, the shepherd's who came to see, Mary and Joseph taking Jesus to the Temple.

I want you to imagine that the Holy Spirit tasked YOU to record the story of Jesus' birth. How would your story unfold, what would you add, or subtract. Think about that...how would your story read?

An extra camel, some town folk, more angels, a few children...perhaps, Zechariah and Elizabeth. There was one additional figure in the Nativity Scene, it is, I was told, this was "a poor beggar" coming to beg Jesus for forgiveness. Always wondered where to place it. Would baby Jesus notice?!

Christmas Eve. Once again, we gather for worship that we might reset the story of His birth into our lives IN CHRIST.

John's Gospel carries no birth narrative, but has Jesus become the center of all of Creation, the Word which was from the beginning..."All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. In him was life and the life was the light of all people." At hearing the first thought might be "How is that possible?" Hard to believe! Yet, here with are with the added assurance: "And the Word became flesh (Like you and like me. When he fell down, he cried; likely pouted; tickle him he laughed; pinch him said "Ouch." At least once ditched his parents in Jerusalem for three days, but not to worry, he was teaching the elders!), and we have seen his glory, the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." Grace...TRUTH who also said, "I am the Light of the world."

Ever been afraid of the dark? I mean really scared?! Extended darkness always leaves me a bit anxious, longing for the light; big storm...greatest fear is that the power will go out and for HOW LONG!

Tonight we share the Lightest Story in the world. Not Gospel lite, but good news light fully on for the sake of the world.

- ✠ The world had waited; the promise had been for generations;
- ✠ 20 centuries later wise men and women, boys and girls still seek him;
- ✠ Our culture's American Songbook has the "one who knows when you are sleeping, who knows when you're awake, who knows when you've been bad or good, so be GOOD FOR GOODNESS SAKE."
- ✠ Our Gospel playbook tells of the One who knows all of the same, but seeks us out that we might become one with God through Jesus Christ, the One whom we trust to be God-With-Us, naming us forever!

In the past weeks as cold and darkness seemed to prevail, we have noted the working of the Holy Spirit to still fear, clear confusion, meet doubt, and guide the curious shepherds to the place where new life begins for all people.

On this night, we are the faithful who have come again to greet the Child, to be near the Lord Jesus and one another, knowing that fulfillment is the gift we are called to unpack first. To let the manger filled, so soon empty as the child is taken to safety, to grow up in Nazareth, to be called to serve, to walk the way of sorrows for us, to die, to rise again that both empty manger and empty tomb become for us the place of hope anew.

At our last Adult Discipleship Hour I challenged those present to help me write one of the most difficult sermons of the year BECAUSE WE KNOW THE STORY SO WELL.

I asked them for the point of the story: This observation caught me---how about Matthew for the wise, Luke for the weak to seek healing. Or, that the truth of equality for all in the forgiveness that God still works to bring peace in human community, between us and those we meet each day. Peace given by the One who was just like us, fully human, fully divine---the Lord of all, our Savior and friend forever.

This year I paid attention to the "poor beggar man." On his death bed, Luther spoke his last words to a friend "We are all beggars before God."

This year, I placed him next to the wise man who likely thought he had all the light needed, until he saw the star...until they brought their gifts and worshipped...until like the shepherds they went to tell and to live in the Light and Love that never fails...until like each one of us this night who are called again to open the gift, receive and savor, with joy knowing that this night, like Jesus, you too can be born anew to a living hope. The generous gift that lasts forever.

So, if you are asked to write the story, Wait! You are the story, we are the story, the only Gospel that many will read in the acts of mercy and love that is the gift to those who have been the manger, the Cross, the empty tomb, at the place where the Holy Spirit places us on earth.

So we pray:

*"O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell: oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel."
And it is so, Amen.*