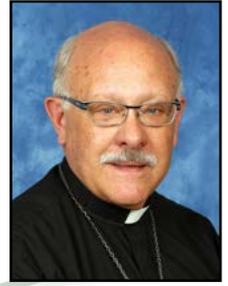




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



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

Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Eve

December 24, 2016
6:30 pm and 9:00 pm

What's Next? / Did You Hear What I Heard?

Luke 2:1-21

"For the grace of God has dawned...salvation to all...the present age...we await for the blessed hope and the age to come...our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem...for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good." Paul to Titus.

Christmas begins a progression of events, in a story that is simply too fantastic on its own. A pretty lofty description, Paul writes, about the impact of the infant born whose life we celebrate.

The Gospel we share is an intentional progression of utter generosity and in fulfillment of the "hopes and fears of all the years" met in one night, in a very out-of-the-way town, in what is a strange venue, surrounded not by "who's who" but who are they?

Our Advent Theme has been "Promise Graciously Given." We have heard of lives touched in utterly remarkable ways...an elderly couple, a carpenter and a very young woman who was given an angel's heads up that she would be with child by the power of the Holy Spirit. Even given the name, "Jesus." The One who is Emmanuel --- God with us. Those who just like us seek to know and to believe that there is a God who cares and shares in our lives.

For us the question could well be "What's Next?" How does it all fit into Bellevue or the community in which we live? That has been a source of academic exploration, conversation, and conversion for two centuries, this God in human form. The Gospel's direction is brand new with a 360 degree turn about back to the future where Sins/Sin set a course of self-aggrandizement, filled with a narcissistic bluff that everything is someone else's problem, responsibility to deal with...as I heard a person say this week, "I just want to be left alone!"

But, wait, FOR YOU, a New Direction for each one of us...new places in new times...mediated by angels, dreams, and stars which compel attention...and draw the gaze of wonderment once they realize that what seems intimidating and absurd to human reason is actually a trip to a place where all are met with the power to be new...renewed...restored to walk into each new day as one of mission...But, wait, one more time, did you hear what I heard?

The message of the angel is that the Gift brings peace...wholly undeserved, you can't buy it, trade for it, whine for it, not just the absence of hostility as if a ceasefire, but a re-fire meant for all...not one greater or more powerful -- Equality for all through the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, He is our peace linking us to the Body of Christ in the world. "For God so loved the world, that God gave...."

Announcement first by the angelic hoverings. It is always back to the hosts of heaven...Jesus' birth and death is the message which makes us all ear-witnesses. "He is not here, He is risen!" We have heard, and blessed are those who trust what they have not seen but truly know by heart knowledge, passed down from generation to generation, time to time, life to life.

Now is the night most blessed of our "dear Savior's birth." Now the silence, now the peace, soon the cup uplifted, bread broken for YOU and for ME. The mission field at the threshold of the church... Never go sell...simply "Go tell." As the Light of Christ carries us forward!

Yet, we know that not all is calm, not all is bright. So, on this night I remember Mary. Simple enough...a young mother cradling her baby boy. In the moment she begins her faith pilgrimage, the faithful, proto/first disciple of Jesus.

✠ how must it have been for this one who pondered in the heart the message and its meaning...

✠ how must it have been for her at the foot of the Cross when the one she bore died...

✠ how must it have been for her on Pentecost when Peter proclaimed "This Jesus whom you crucified, God raised from the dead."

Promise Graciously Given; Promise Faithfully Received. Jesus is the Love of God that lifts us up; Jesus is the One who binds us to one another. Come to the Manger, come to the Table. We are the guests to the Bread of Life.

Empty Manger; Empty Tomb. Now we bear the news of this night to the ends of the earth. For we are this night cradled and enfolded by the God who made the first move and will always have the final word. And that is the good news we have heard.

Today's New York Times Op-Ed had an insightful writing on the theme "Humanizing Jesus." Speaks inspired insight---[*Read parts of it...*]

Merry Christ-mas, blessed new year of our Lord, 2017. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.