



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



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

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 24, 2017

All Ready - 1, 2, 3

Luke 1:57-66; Luke 2:1-7

Time is deeply curious; a courtesy someone once taught me. We have all learned that being on time is important. Not good to leave others waiting.

Advent has been about waiting. Seemingly compacted this year because of calendar time and the fact that today is both the Fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve.

What to do? Cancel this one was one alternative. I took a Five-Pastor Survey---5 of 5 are following our schedule of worship on this Lord's Day. So, this is the day the Lord has made for us to worship in two tones: waiting for the One and celebrating the One who is born to redeem --- "...for when the fullness of time had come, God sent his son...." JUST IN TIME!

Our service began with Thanksgiving for Baptism. Not the usual way, but an important way to remember the purpose in Jesus' coming. Remember? "For God so loved the world...he gave...only Son...whoever believes in him might be saved."

It is the memory that the God who sent the Son also sent the Holy Spirit to be God within us. And to keep alive, not just the birth of Jesus, but our rebirth in the waters of Holy Baptism. The Font, Saint Ambrose wrote, is the womb of the Church!

Being named "child of God" is a gift of grace. And our worship in this time is about those whose gift of grace was to be deeply involved in God's great plan of salvation.

Think about that for a moment...we are not saved by works, deep knowledge, or through some obscure philosophy; can't buy a "FAITH PACK" on Amazon.

We are saved because our Creator God chose to be involved with humanity; those who unfriended God in Genesis; refriended in Jesus, the Word made flesh.

Dear Zechariah, father of John called Baptist; Elizabeth, mentor and support to Mary.

Dear Mary, mother of Jesus; Joseph, beloved father of Jesus who might have had second thoughts along the way.

Four who trusted and believed that the plan of God was for the salvation of the world. For the hand of the Lord was with them.

I can identify with them because they waited and when the time had fully come, when time was ripe, they were ALL READY.

Two sons received in the mystery of human birth to serve divine purpose that we might believe and know, trust and share, that in John the Pointer (“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”) and in Jesus the Fulfiller (“I and the Father are one.”) history would be, could be, changed forever.

That’s why I am here! Not a fluke of vocation, but in a deep sense of calling I first felt in middle school, the 7th grade.

It was a librarian who sensed that I had a spiritual strain. Not ever in her witness, but she introduced me Thomas Merton, the Trappist Monk, whose spiritual insight became my mentoring path. In fact, at one point I imagined becoming a monk. Problem is, a Trappist doesn’t talk. I would not have made a very good one 😊

I first read The Silent Life. I still have my paperback copy (Cost me 50 cents). I was fascinated that God could be approached and engaged in my life. It was the first sense I had that something, some power outside of me and my own will, could change my heart, my life, my way.

Typical adolescence, quiet student most of the time, but I continued to read Merton. Began to wonder where I would go with him in my formative years. And I was, in a sense, getting ready.

In my sophomore college year, just over 5 years from my “Merton Dive,” I became convinced through the Gospel of Mark, the action story of Jesus, that my life would take a path into a deeper walk with the One I came to know as Savior, Lord, and Friend.

ALL READY...it took a pivot point to lead me to the the path of ordained ministry. And it took me to a Lutheran Pastor who uploaded me into Luther’s Small Catechism

I had memorized most of it in my two year Confirmation conformation...but not until Pastor Hilpert took me on, did I really begin to get this grace thing.

And these were the words that became my “Velcro” bonding to this whole Jesus and Christmas Thing:

Martin Luther’s Explanation to the Second Article of the Apostle’s Creed ---“IN BELIEVE THAT JESUS CHRIST, TRUE GOD, BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER IN ETERNITY, AND ALSO A TRUE HUMAN BEING, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY IS MY LORD.” God owns and names me outright through the waters of Baptism. Cross-Sealed, I am.

“HE HAS REDEEMED ME, A LOST AND CONDEMNED HUMAN BEING. HE HAS PURCHASED AND FREED ME FROM ALL SINS, FROM DEATH, AND FROM THE POWER OF THE DEVIL, NOT WITH GOLD OR SILVER BUT WITH HIS HOLY, PRECIOUS BLOOD AND WITH HIS INNOCENT SUFFERING AND DEATH.” Did all that for ME, for YOU, for US! My Lord and my God!

“HE HAS DONE ALL! ALL! THIS IN ORDER THAT I MAY BELONG TO HIM, LIVE UNDER HIM IN HIS KINGDOM, AND SERVE HIM IN ETERNAL RIGHTEOUSNESS, INNOCENCE, AND BLESSEDNESS, JUST AS HE IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD AND LIVES AND RULES ETERNALLY.” Talk about a complete package, no upgrades, no expiration, no looking for another better way. FREE!

“THIS IS MOST CERTAINLY TRUE!” Or, as a good Baptist might say, “AMEN. AMEN.”

Susan Hegedus creates amazing bulletin covers. The one for this service is my bridge to this evening and the singing of “Joy to the Word.”

A wooden manger to be the bed of the “little Lord Jesus” where he could lay down his sweet head.

An hour glass as symbol of time, our time, my time, which passes so quickly. I sense that each day and most recently in the death of Saint George Edward Short, my mentor, my friend.

The shadow of the Cross already set it seems in the city of David, called Bethlehem.

At Communion, where Jesus meets us anew at the Table of Blessing, two songs from Taize, usually first heard in the time of Lent. As if to remind us that this God loves His own, guards and keeps us to the end. And, if the God He called "Father" is for US, nothing can prevail against us ever.

ALL READY? I think I am. Oh, there are three points, but I ask you to create them in the next lengthening of days. When the gifts are opened, celebration shared, take a silent time to listen, to learn to dream about the new days we share in 2018.

What Child is this who came to change us, this, this is Christ the King whose reign lasts forever.

He is our true gift, let us re-gift Him praise and service in His name. Amen.