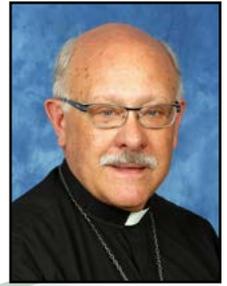




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



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

Christmas Eve -- Family Worship Service

December 24, 2018

4:00 pm

The Perfect Christmas

Luke 2:1-20; Matthew 2:1-23

It is the same old story...year after year...and I find that, each time, each time I read it/hear it I slow down and want to read and hear it at a pace that helps me remember that Jesus bar/son of Joseph is the same one who will one day say, "My God, My God what have you forsaken me."

But, for the time being we are here, all God's children to hear, to believe and to trust again that this birth is different than any other in human history.

So, what brings you here tonight? Habit, tradition, family tradition, pre-gift moment, feast time soon; the carols of old...or is it just the candles? Lit, light spreading on what most would say is a HOLY NIGHT.

But, let's be clear: this is not a birth without difficulty: a young girl, unmarried, no room for them, cold, with only shepherds and a few wise men.

Oft times, not the kind of birth we would long for in our times. At risk; violence on the way through the fears of Herod and that there might be a revolution in the making in the days of the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. A little like, some would say, the Pax Americana.

Births are not always convenient. Yet, we will sing of a silent night, where all seems holy, all is calm, all is bright, round yon virgin mother and child. And it seems, it well might not be that all is chill, all is right, and sleep can come in heavenly peace.

Each year we have shared this night, I have hoped for days when things were more, well, news-worthy for all that is good.

I have prayed for a time when the candles could be lit and joy would surround, hope would abound, peace would prevail, love would extend into a world where all would be fed and housed, supported and living a life that is sustainable where it may have been uncertain.

Some would say, "Your expectations are way to high!" I would respond that for those who have received much, much is expected and life is meant to be lived as if each action, each word spoken, is as if it was done to Jesus! The One who has made our homeless His home.

In the time of Advent, we have asked "What Child is this?" It is a purpose question that welcomes a response from each one of us who worship this night and who have heard the angels sing!

Sometimes this whole Jesus thing sounds so far away, unapproachable, as if someone made up a cool story. Some years ago, a very young child rushed out of worship and said, "Pastor Jim, this is really exciting news. Did you know that Jesus was born in a barn in Bellingham?" So near, so clear, and maybe he felt we could all visit sometime!

This night we have been visited anew. With the assurance that the story can be heard AS IF for the very first time. I kind of like that thought in the midst of the 24/7 world we seem to serve in: an opportunity to live and to witness in a world where PRIME is mostly about loving and being light; lives that surround all with the mercy and forgiveness we share in Jesus Christ, son of Mary, Son of God...did ya know?

So, what are you thinking right now? A word, a phrase, a picture...a gift you forgot to get (Still time!) OR "Did I turn the stove off when we left for services?"

Let me recalibrate you...in this silence of the moment...(pause)

Silent night, holy night!

Son of God, love's pure light...

The dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus, Lord, a your birth! Jesus, Lord at your birth!

I have been at a moment of birth-giving twice in my life...the wait, the prayer, the fear and confidence wrapped in the cutting of an umbilical cord.

I will never forget the first cry...as if it were tonight!

Tonight may you hear the first cry of the little Lord Jesus; imagine the eyes of a mother, the wonder of a father...hear the angels voice, see shepherd and Magi and join them at the cradle.

Then, carry the Baby Jesus.

† Imaginatively.

† Remember the care and caress and in the holding.

† Imagine you are carrying that child into the world...how would you insure the safety, tell the story, guide the growing, show the ways to walk in the truth of call...you carry that dna out of the waters of Holy Baptism and in your disciple-journey! The Cross is set even at Bethlehem, the house of bread, and the Bread of Life, Jesus, will rise one day too.

But, for the time being, we sing "Joy to the World." And to believe that heaven and nature sing in the lives we live in Christ. And never forget, THE CHILDREN ARE WATCHING, LISTENING. For you to be the presence of Christ for them, until He comes again.

So, where is that perfect Christmas for you, for me? Long ago in the land we have learned to call HOLY. He came down then, in flesh, like you, like me, for the sake of the world. Never forget that God cared enough to send the very best. And we are called to simply remember, to live, to tell the story of Jesus and His love!