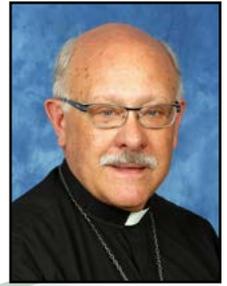




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



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

Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Eve

December 24, 2018

6:30 pm and 9:00 pm

The End of Fear is Now

Luke 2:1-20

This night of all nights, I ask you to remember the words of Jesus, grown up son of Mary and Joseph, speaking to His disciples about their mission in the world: "Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

So, beloved, when for you was THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS? Recall the time, the place, the people, the smells and tastes, the tearing of packages opening...IF there were any? Remember that for some, there are none!

What is the message you remember, the take away or three each time you have been at worship on Christmas Eve? What will it be when you leave this service and how will it look by December 27th?

Tonight the world is mess, but wait, when hasn't it been with the centuries of change, of warfare, of scarcity? When have there ever not been times of change in the socio-economic-political environment of the world? Even read the Old/First Testament, not much peace there...

And remember the times in which Jesus was born.

It was within the oppressive, grinding machinery of the Roman Empire and the family of Herod; the same ones which will one day kill Mary's son.

In the days when the empire required and commanded a census to see who was in and who was not; Joseph and Mary are directed to a place of first residence that taxes may be levied for the sake of the government. But, wait, what the empire does not know is that God is up to something that will ensure God's mercy and justice for all. And this family was without housing security!

The story of His birth never changes; but the context of our hearing, our living is never the same. Think about that tonight! What are your hopes and fears of all the years; your dreams and visions of the new day that is on the horizon, 2019, the Year of Our Lord.

If you were here on any Sunday of Advent, the bulletin cover was a manger, with a question mark watermark. We were asked "What Child is This?" What will it mean for us to believe and to trust that the child will grow and one day will preach and act when some will say, "Can anything good come out of the city of Nazareth?"

Yet, we have learned in our years that what was good, is great, came from the womb of Mary in a town whose name is, literally, "house of bread." Not coincidentally, the city of David. The line from the first covenant when all will become the forgiven ones won and brought home through the life and the death of the promised savior.

On the Fourth Sunday of Advent, the question mark was seen to be a shepherd's crook, in symbol of the one day words of Jesus that He is the Shepherd, the lays down His life for the sake of the sheep. A final act of love for the world and the real reason for the season before and after the places of shopping are generally closed, PRIME notwithstanding!

Who is this child we remember...what brings you here tonight?

Do you know what the phone calls inquiring about service times ask? "Do you light real candles and sing "Silent Night?" You bet we do, but in a time when all is not calm and all is not bright, we are here as those upon whom the dawn of forgiveness is set in the One who will one day say "It is finished" and mean it forever!

Once, yesterday, a preacher I have learned from, his breakthrough for me! In the midst of a children's telling of the Christmas Gospel, he mentioned the angel, shepherd and wise folk costumes. (By the way there were 5 Magi, mixed gender!) That one is for you Meg M!

And he said, "As they wore the costumes they became angels, shepherds, wise guys, Magi. In the same, Jesus, born of Mary, the Word made flesh, put on our costume (flesh and ALL) that He might become us and that we might become Him, the Body of Christ in the world, living and loving, serving and caring that others might know the true life that is from above.

And I got it! Do you? Jesus is God's gift to unwrap and share all of our days. The Jesus whose love binds us together to be a people turned out into the world that God so loves.

This Jesus, God-with-us/Immanuel casts out fear; marks for us the END OF FEAR. Recall the angel's message...to nodding off shepherds?

"Do not be afraid; see--I am bring you good news of great joy for ALL people...to YOU is born...a Savior, Messiah, Lord." Then, the angels sang.

Not sure I would have lasted through that one...but, they went, they saw, they shared! The best Christmas ever! And they were the first witnesses.

Tonight! Might we agree this is a Christmas of new beginning for YOU and for ME! Let me be clear one more time--this Jesus means to transform and make us new from the Cross to the end of our days.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote: Who among us will celebrate Christmas correctly? Whoever finally lays down all power, all honor, all reputation, all vanity, all arrogance, all individualism beside the manger; whoever remains lowly and lets God alone be high; whoever looks at the child in the manger and sees the glory of God precisely in his lowliness."

In a lowly manger once, grace dawned a new time of light and love; basking in that tonight have the power in time to be renewed for each new day.

To stand as one and behold God coming to us at Font, in the Word, at the Table. That we might learn to hear and see anew!

And, then, in the midst of all things, to live with humble servant civility, in the words we speak and the actions of our day. That all might see us and know that we have been with Jesus.

May it be so, in Jesus' name, Merry Christmas!