

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church



Christmas I - 2006

*“In the beginning was the Word and –
the Word was with God and the Word was God....*

And -

“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”
St. John 1:9



Some People react to the Christmas season in different ways:

One Little Girl after receiving –

an abundance of Christmas Presents remarked:

“I wish that Mary & Joseph would have another Baby next year.”

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A mother remarked to her next door neighbor that:

On Christmas Eve –

A pot bellied bearded man with a pack on his back –
crept into our House.....

It was my son –

coming home from College with his dirty laundry.

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Though it is the Sunday after Christmas –

we are still very much within –

the Traditional Twelve Days of Christmas –

Wherein we continue to Celebrate –

The Coming of our Lord into this World.

There is still a little boy deep down inside of me –

That just hates to see -

Christmas Trees strewn along side the curbs –

The day after Christmas –

As if the Festivities and the Celebrations were all over.

For we Episcopalians –

Christmas too big of an event –

Christmas is too Monumental –

To do it justice in just one day.

It takes us at least Twelve days –

to properly give Christmas the time and –the honor it so richly deserves.

So during these Twelve Days –
We continue to explore –
We continue to learn and –
To understand the meaning of

The Divine Mystery of the Incarnations –
God for us –
God with us and -
God within us.

For we Humans – this is a lifelong endeavor
Most of all –
We continue to learn of a God –
who is not capricious or who is out to get us –
But we learn of a God who is out to save us –

The Great and Wonderful Mystery –
Of the Incarnation –

The Good News –
about the God we Worship –
the God who made the Heavens and the Earth –

the God who by His own hand –
flung out Orion and all the other planets and –
stars into outer space -

This God -
has shown Himself and who He is –
He has shown His inner mind and heart -

In none other than –
the unpretentious Lowly Carpenter –
Jesus of Nazareth.

This is the Good News in which we rejoice –
and which celebrate at Christmas –

That our God is one of infinite Love and Compassion –
of infinite Mercy and Forgiveness –

A God as Jesus portrayed -
A God whom one could approach –
One Who wanted nothing else –
but for His People to have an abundant life –

People who would live –
in Peace and Harmony with One Another –
People who would be willing to Forgive each other –

People who would be willing –
to share their resources with the poor and needy.

Unless we understand this –
we miss the Glory and the Wonder of –
the Mystery of the Incarnation –
the Word Made flesh who came and dwelt among us.

The very first story that I ever heard about Christmas –
the first Christmas that –
I became an Episcopalian was this:

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The Little boy afraid of the dark:
“Yes - but I would like to have someone with me –
that had skin on them.”

Surely this is something of what it means –
that the word was made Flesh and dwelt among us.
That is

God in all His Glory and Power manifested –
in the Man – the Person of Jesus.

A beautiful description of that Holy Night –
was written by the Poets –
John & Mary Harrell –

In their famous: “Hello in Exile”
They Write:
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“A World whirled and staggered –
In a night of catastrophic happenings –
When God spoke and –
The Eternal Word became –
Contemporaneous with temporal humankind.”

Yes –
this is an unbelievably beautiful description –
Of the birth of our Lord.

The Poet Christina Rossetti describes –
The Birth of our Lord in this way:

“Love Came Down at Christmas time.”

Yet -

St. John in his Gospel gives us in only a few words –

The best description of all –

Of that Holy Night when he writes & tells us that:

“In the beginning was the Word –

And the Word was with God

And the Word was God -

And -

“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”

Someone has said that if most all of the Holy Scriptures

Were somehow lost –

In these verses –

We would still have the Essence of –

The Christian Gospel and The Essence Christian Faith.

While Easter is the called the Queen of Feasts –

For it is –

The Principal Feast Day of the Christian Year –

Yet -

Without the Nativity – the Birth of our Lord –

There would be no Good Friday –

There would be - no Cross and - no Resurrection –

And no Easter and -

And there would be no Redemption –and -

there would be no Atonement and -

There would be no Reconciliation with God -

For which all Creation

Has been yearning, waiting & longing –

since the dawn of mankind.

But also-

Jesus came into this World –

Not only to reconcile us with God-

But to reconcile us to one another –

To bring the World together-

To unite the Family of Nations –

Wherein everyone would live together –
In Harmony - Justice & Peace.

Jesus' most earnest prayer –
In the Garden of Gethsemane –
The night before the crucifixion –

Jesus in His High Priestly Prayed this prayer -
At least four times:
“Father – Father -

That they may be One –
Even as You and I are One.”

Jesus came into the World –
To put an end to the divisions and –
The enmity between people and nations.

And since the Church is the extension of the Incarnation –
This means that we are to carry on and –
We are to continue His work of Reconciliation –

A Task that the World needs today –
More than ever before.

It is true that hearts may beat like thunder –
At the sight of the Empty Tomb –
At the Resurrection of our Lord.

But it is also true that hearts are the stillest –
Hearts are the stillest –
At the Manger of Bethlehem –

Kneeling before the Child born to be the King of Kings –
And the Savior of the World.

The Great Preacher –
Bishop Phillips Brooks –
Was so right on the mark when he looked
out of his hotel window early one morning In Bethlehem –
when he wrote –

In one of his verses of “O Little Town of Bethlehem,”
“How silently –
How silently - the wondrous gift is given.....”

It is very strange that our Lord's birth -
Though foretold & prophesied in the Scriptures -
Was not even noticed -
By the prophets and sages -

Those religious who should have known and -
who should have been waiting and expecting -
the coming of the Holy One -
No - the Birth of the Messiah was not even -
noticed by the religious leaders -
But only noticed by a few poor humble Shepherds.

Indeed -
This was to be sure -
A precursor to the fact -
That Jesus was to be -
The Good Shepherd of the Sheep -
The Title that He Himself in His heart of hearts -
Truly claimed and embraced.

And -
As He is called in the Epistle of Peter -
The Great Shepherd & Bishop of our Souls.

The One born in Bethlehem - which means:
"The House of Bread,"
Has then become the "Bread of Life,"

Which our Lord has promised that:
"If anyone eats of this Bread -
He shall live forever."

To eat of this bread -
Means that we take on the kind of Life -
That Jesus lived -

Which was a Life of -
Love & Mercy & Forgiveness -
Of inclusiveness -

Inclusiveness -
That includes all people -
for all people mattered to Jesus -
People of all shades and differences -
no matter who they might be -

and maybe especially –
Jesus had a love and a concern for -
the ones whom we despise and look down upon.
For all People extremely mattered to Him.

Christmas is a joyful season –
Of giving and receiving Gifts –

But it is also a Season –
That places upon us Expectations –
Expectations that our Lord has of us –
Of each one of us.

Our Lord came to enlist an Army-
A Salvation Army if you please –
An Army to follow Him into those
Dark places –

Those dark places -
Where the need –
For the Light of God is so enormous.
Where the Sanctity and the Sacredness of Human Life –
Is totally disregarded –

But -
We fight not with guns and swords –
But we are Armed –
With the Love and the Grace of God –

that enables us “to work for Justice & Peace –
And to Respect the Dignity of Every Human Being.”

We are but one - but we are one –
and each of us has the opportunity –
to shed the Light of Christ into those dark places.

Goethe said that :
“If everyone swept off their door step –
soon the whole World would be clean.”
By this he meant that –
When each and everyone of us –
truly and sincerely reckoned with our lives –
according to God’s will –

Then God’s will on Earth will be done as it is in Heaven.

Brethen –
We are living in a time –
Where we must learn to contend with –
The Plurality of Ethnic Groups –
The Plurality of Religions and Cultures.

It is not a question of if we want to –
It is already a fact of life –

It is already a fact of life –
That we must learn to live together –
and to respect one another's differences.

And though others may have other ideas –
And ways that are contrary and opposed to -
To God's Will and -

Ways that are contrary and repulsive to our thinking –
and contrary to our beliefs –
Whereby they have a complete disregard –
and a disrespect for Human Life –

And yet -
As St. Paul emphatically told the Christians at Corinth:
“IT SHALL NOT BE SO WITH YOU !!!”

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The Story is told of a widely separated Family –
That inherits their Father's Grand Estate –
The conditions of the Will are this:

That they must all live together and –
Inhabit the premises together or –
Not any of them may have it at all.

The Human Family is precisely –
in that same condition today –

God has given us this wonderful world –
For all of us to live in –
In Justice and Peace –
And if not then -
we are in danger of losing it all.

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The Message of Christmas is that:

“The One in whom we live and move and have our being –
Is the God of Love.”

Who comes to us in the Child of Bethlehem –
and who grew to become the King of Kings –
And the Lord of Lords –

Yes it is True that -
Mary had a Little Lamb-
and that Little Lamb grew up to be -
as John the Baptist proclaimed :

The Lamb of God –
the Lamb who take away the Sins of the world.

And for those who have come to know Him –
They have found His Life to have –
“The Ring of Truth” about it –

For that in His Life is revealed –
the Full and the Perfect Image –
Of the God He came to make known.

Though Humankind for centuries upon end –
Has struggled to know and to learn of God
Christmas tells us –
That we no longer need to speculate about God –

For as St. Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians –
That Jesus is the Image of –
The Invisible God –

And that In Jesus –
The fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

So when we leave our Worship Services today –
We walk out with the glorious knowledge –
And the blessed Assurance –
That God is for us –
That God is with us –
And that God is within us.

And together with Him –
And together with one another –

Where ‘ere He Leads we will follow

We will shrink not back –
But in Faith -

We will follow –
We will follow behind the One –
Behind The One Who is the lead Cross.

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“In the beginning was the Word –
And the Word was with God-
And the Word was God

And -
The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”

A M E N & A M E N !!!

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