

Saint Matthew's Episcopal Church

Christmas, December 25, 2020

READINGS:

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalms 96

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

We Christians LOVE to tell the Christmas story!

Luke's Gospel tells it for us every year, and it for more than 2,000 years it has never failed to hold our attention.

We love hearing the story of a young couple walking for ten days from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register for the census and pay their taxes. We love hearing the story of a town filled to overflowing with travelers, and a baby born in a stable and cradled in a manger because there was no room in the inn. We love hearing the story of terrified shepherds rushing into town to see a new baby after a joyful angel host tells them the Good News of a savior!

We really DO love to tell this story - I love to tell it!

I love it because it is the beginning of the story of Jesus, who came to be one of us. I love it because it is a story filled with such overpowering emotions - joy, fear, love, wonder.

I LOVE to hear the Christmas story! I LOVE to tell it! And yet, once in a while, I listen to the story, and I wonder WHY - why did God choose to be one of us?

Why did Jesus NOT come the first time the way all our Advent season readings tell us he will come when he returns?

That coming will be kingly.

It will be glorious.

It will be powerful beyond description.

Why not just do that the first time, too?

Sometimes I wonder.....Do you?

One of my favorite Christmas hymns asks that question:

"I wonder as I wander out under the sky

How Jesus the Savior did come for to die

For poor ord'nry people like you and like I;

I wonder as I wander out under the sky...

Many years ago, in one of Father Mike Garrison's Christmas Eve sermons, he told us a story.

The story answered that question in a way that I still love.

Some of you may have heard it before. It is called the Parable of the Birds, and we don't know who told it first.

There was once a good man, the story goes, who thought Christmas was just humbug. Why in the world would God choose to be born as a person! And why, of all things as a poor little kid, in a stable! No matter how much he thought about it, it just didn't make sense to him.

Every year, he sent his family off to church on Christmas Eve, but stayed at home himself. One particular year, just as the family left for church, it began to snow, and the storm quickly got worse and worse.

Outside his front door, the man heard a thud, and then another! When he opened the door to see what was happening, he discovered that a flock of birds, lost in the storm, had landed in his yard. They were so small and so cold, and very confused.

"They need help!" He thought. So, he tried to give them shelter in his barn. He opened the doors and turned on the lights. The birds just sat in the snow. Not one moved.

Next, he tried sprinkling a trail of breadcrumbs from outside into the barn through the open door. "Maybe they will follow the food," he thought. Not a bird moved a muscle!

He even tried circling them, flapping his arms to "herd" them in. NO LUCK. The birds just scattered and huddled down again in the snow. "They don't understand! They think I'm a strange and terrifying creature! If only I could be one of them, to lead them to safety," he said to himself.

By now, it was nearly midnight. Through the cold air, he heard the church bells in town begin to ring. The Christmas Eve service was about to start. Suddenly, just like that, the man understood. He sank to his knees in the snow, saying: "Lord, now I see why You had to do it."

Why did Jesus come to be one of us? That's why. It's all about understanding!
God knew us - knew we would understand His Son!

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light", says the prophet Isaiah in our Old Testament reading. "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests on his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

To these names, let us add one more: "EMMANUEL" - GOD WITH US!

God who became a human like us.

God who came be with his people.

To live our life.
To die our death.
To save us from our sins.
To be sure we would understand him and follow him home!

We Christians LOVE to tell the Christmas story!

We love the angel choir, the scared shepherds, the holy family; silly ox faces looking down into a manger (and maybe stealing a bite of hay;) a great light dawning on the world; a child born for us!

We DO love to tell the story!

So people of Saint Matthew's/San Mateo: Go! Tell the Christmas story!

Sound the trumpet! Tell the message! Christ the Savior King is here!!

Oh, and do more than just TELL. BE! Be the people Saint Paul describes in his letter to Titus. Be people - God's people - who are zealous for good deeds.

Emmanuel has come, to lead us to safety!

Merry Christmas!!!

Amen.