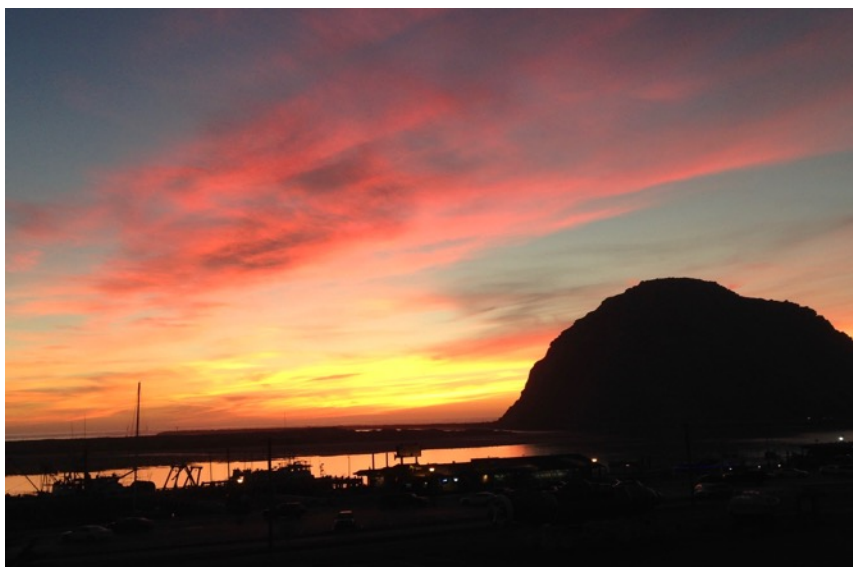


## The Sunday Missive, January 3 2021



### The Second Sunday of Christmas

**Greetings, one and all**, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Nancy Castle, Jan Swanson, Jeff Wheelwright and I bring you this service of prayer, scripture and song with love. If you go to our facebook page, you can watch and participate from home: [facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay](https://www.facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay) Scroll down until you see today's Sunday Missive, anytime after 11 A.M. on Sunday, January 3. No facebook account is needed! The links that follow each hymn will take you to youtube videos of a wide range of people around the world singing those hymns – enjoy them! Please direct any questions or comments to your rector, The Rev. Sidney Symington via: (203) 209-2339 or: [sssymington@gmail.com](mailto:sssymington@gmail.com). **Let us pray:**

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Most gracious God, through Advent and Christmas, we have faithfully listened to the story of your holy Child; we have been nourished and emboldened by the love you teach us to bear one another. Now we humbly entreat your mercy that we may become your children both in name and in truth, and carry your loving kindness into this new year with high hopes and firm conviction to do the work you give us to do each day, through Christ the Lord. **Amen**

## **Hymn 82 – Of the Father’s Love Begotten Vss. 1, 3 & 4**

Of the Father's love begotten, ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega, he the source, the ending he,  
Of the things that are, that have been,  
And that future years shall see, evermore and evermore!

Let the heights of heaven adore him; angel hosts, his praises sing;  
Powers, dominions, bow before him, and extol our God and King;  
Let no tongue on earth be silent, every voice in concert ring,  
Evermore and evermore!

Christ, to thee with God the Father, and, O Holy Ghost, to thee,  
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving, and unwearied praises be;  
Honor, glory and dominion, and eternal victory,  
Evermore and evermore!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOF9JLjkPis>

## **A Reading from the Prophecy of Jeremiah – Chapter 31**

Thus says the Lord: You shall be built anew, O Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merry-makers. You shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when the sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim: “Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.” And with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble.

Hear the word of the Lord, and declare it in the coastlands far away; they shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord: over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance; the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. I will give them their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty. This is the Word of the Lord.

## **Psalm 147**

Alleluia! Praise the Lord who is good\* Sing psalms to our loving God.

For the Lord builds up Jerusalem\* And brings back the exiles of Israel.

It is God who heals the broken-hearted\* Who binds up all their wounds.

Who fixes the number of the stars\* And calls each one by name.

Our Lord is great and almighty\* With wisdom that can never be measured.

The Lord raises up the lowly\* And humbles the wicked to dust.

O sing to the Lord giving thanks\* Sing psalms to God with the harp.

Who covers the heavens with clouds\* And prepares the rain for the earth.

Making mountains sprout with green grass\* And providing the beasts with their food.

The Lord delights in those who serve justice\* And lifts up those who act only in love.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOqMmx\\_592Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOqMmx_592Y)

### **A Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians – Chapter 1**

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have obtained an inheritance, so that all who set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. You also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory. This is the Word of the Lord.

## **Hymn 102 – Once in Royal David’s City – Vss. 1, 3 & 5**

Once in royal David's city stood a lowly cattle shed,  
Where a mother laid her baby in a manger for his bed:  
Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little child.

We, like Mary rest confounded that a stable should display Heaven’s Word,  
the world’s creator cradled there on Christmas day, yet this child, our lord  
and brother, brought us love for one another.

And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love; for that  
child who seemed so helpless is our Lord in heaven above; and he leads his  
children on to the place where he is gone.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TT3cfXd3Shk>

## **A Reading from the Gospel According to Matthew – Chapter 2**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and calling together all the chief priests and scribes, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem, for so it has been written by the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, are by no means least among the rulers of Judea; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’” Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and

remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and return to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazarean." This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Astronomers last week pointed** out a rarity called the "Greatest Conjunction," where Jupiter and Saturn were so close together from Earth's perspective that they appeared strangely huge and magnificent in the southwestern sky. The Star of Bethlehem was thought by Kepler to have been one of these Greatest Conjunctions. It occurred in the year 7 BCE and would have been visible from the Levant, Mesopotamia and Southwest Asia, the area east of Palestine, in the western Sky late at night. Some have even rashly claimed it was an "Occultation" of Saturn by Jupiter, where the two planets appear to merge into a single glowing object when seen from Earth. According to current calculations however, such an event has not occurred within recorded history. By the way, the next occultation of Saturn by Jupiter won't take place until 7541, at which point, Earthlings, if there still are such creatures, will hopefully have stopped arguing about this subject.

We would do well to pay attention to scientific discoveries like those of the astronomers. The sciences explore the world that we know to be God's creation, so it makes sense for us to seek coherence between the two realms of consideration. Yes, it raises the question of authority: What takes

precedence over what? But where we mistake ourselves is in assuming conflict between the two. Our error is in assuming science and religion to be answering the same questions. We have to look more closely at our sacred texts and ask what they are trying to do instead. What are the stories in the Torah conveying about cosmos and covenant and commitment? What affect do the Psalms have on our spirits? What is in the histories about justice and war and international relations that we could use to become better nations?

Of the New Testament, Evelyn Underhill writes, "The birth of Christ in our souls is for a purpose beyond ourselves: it is because his manifestation in the world must be through us. Every Christian is, as it were, part of the dust-laden air which shall radiate the glowing epiphany of God, catch and reflect God's golden light."

All of Creation, not just the Church, is the theater of God's saving work. As Lenny so beautifully put it last week, "As we interpret Jesus, the incarnation of God, so we must see the world too, as the incarnation of God; so that as we do a just act to one of the least of God's creatures, we do it to God." We have to see ourselves as a kind of servant and sacramental presence, trusting that God's purpose is the completion and fulfillment of the world, drawing it ever more deeply into the divine life. If we want to be good at being this presence, we must always try to know the world better. The more we do, the more attuned we will be to God.

This is what Paul is trying to tell the Ephesians when he writes: "According to his good pleasure God has made known to us the mystery of his plan for the fullness of time: to gather up all things on heaven and on earth into himself. In Christ we too have inherited our vocation: that we might live for the praise of God's glory."

The story of the Magi appears in Matthew's Gospel and nowhere else in the canonical Bible. Likewise, the Flight into Egypt, and King Herod's Slaughter of the Innocents that prompted that flight. Lots of faithful scholars think Matthew made them up. There is no historical record of such a massacre. And a five-hundred-mile, post-partum donkey ride across the Sinai peninsula with your two-week old baby doesn't sound very appealing, or even very likely. No woman made up this story.

But if we look at today's slice of Jeremiah a little more closely, we might get a clue as to what Matthew's infant stories can do for us, faithwise. What exactly happened to this little family geographically is not nearly so important as what happened to them spiritually. And the same goes for us. The power of God's spirit, working through the wonder of the shepherds

who gathered around, the gifts and adoration of those wise fellows from afar, and the steadfast commitment of Mary and Joseph brought about a transformation of the family from a fragile, tenuous, frightened little trio of wayfarers into bearers of the living God. “See,” says God in Jeremiah’s witness, “I am going to bring them from the land of the North, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, the blind, the lame, those with child and those in labor together. With weeping they shall go, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water on a straight path where they shall not stumble.”

This is about hope. Jeremiah was writing when the kingdom of Judah had been completely dispersed. The leaders and many of the people had been taken into exile in Babylon, to the North. And everyone else had fled southward into Egypt. Yet the prophet says they have already been ransomed; the machinery is already working. This tells us no matter how far down the scale we have gone, we can know that our lives are precious in God’s eyes; that each and every day can, not just portend, but be a day of redemption, renewal, and rebirth.

We can know that God will enter our own situations of fear and suffering, no matter what they are. We have the guarantee of God’s transforming power in our individual lives and in our families. The people of Judah are going through a process together. This process comprises all of life and promises to continue even beyond death. In his *Divine Dawning*, Thomas Aquinas writes: “Light of lights! All gloom dispelling, thou didst come to make thy dwelling here within our world of sight. Lord, in pity and in power, thou didst in our darkest hour rend the clouds and show thy light.”

We give thanks for this gloom-dispelling light. Of all Christmasses, this one has had us begging for reassurance as we’re forced to do without the singing, the hugging, the warmth and laughter and revelry we know and love. In the absence of so much of what we are accustomed to in our celebrations, the promise of Jesus’ birth can make a deeper and richer impression on our hearts than ever before. This experience can lead us to a rediscovery of what we truly value, if we will only pay attention. From now on, when we celebrate each year with our families of faith and with our families of origin and of choice, might we be more purposefully aware of the origin and source of love itself?

## **Prayers**

We pray for our world, in the midst of a terrifying pandemic, for those who are ill and their loved ones, especially George Regas, Tony, Dorene, are

there others?. We pray for those who care for the sick, and those who work in science and medicine. Bless their hands and hearts and let them know we are grateful.

We pray for those who have died, especially Don Rose, Richard Leslie, and Doris Hryckvich and their families. May theirs and the souls of all the faithful departed, by your boundless mercies rest in peace. We pray for the people of St. Peter's by the Sea, the San Luis Obispo Deanery, and the Diocese of El Camino Real. May we know that our lives are always in your loving care.

Gracious and loving God, we lift up these prayers to you, along with meditations of all our hearts. Calm our fears and anxiety and be with us through these trying months. Help us to understand the changes in our world, to accept the things that we cannot control, to do what we can to slow the virus, and to be patient and loving to one another. All this we ask through Jesus, who is Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

#### **Hymn 112 – In the Bleak Midwinter -- Vss. 1, 3 & 4**

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,  
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;  
snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,  
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,  
cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;  
but his mother only, in her maiden bliss,  
worshiped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
if I were a wise man, I would do my part;  
yet what I can I give him--give my heart.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2dTbnh0A0c>

May the Lord go before you with heavenly light, always and everywhere, that you may perceive with clear sight, act with pure intention and revere one another with true affection. And may the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier remain with you and your loved ones this day and forevermore.