

The Sunday Missive – December 27, 2020



The First Sunday of Christmas

Greetings, one and all, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea on this, the First Sunday of Christmas. Lenny Erickson, Nancy Castle, Jan Swanson, Jeff Wheelwright, Sid Symington 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 Missive, anytime after 11 A.M. on Sunday morning. 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. **Let us pray:**

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting.

Shed upon your Church, O Lord, the brightness of your light, that we, being illumined by the teaching of your apostle and evangelist John, may so walk in the light of your truth, that at length we may attain to the fullness of eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

O God, who makes us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Renew us this day through our worship of you, that the days to come may be spent in your service; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

O God, sustain your Church as we face new tasks in the confusions of this changing world. By your Holy Spirit give us good judgment and the strength to persevere, so that we may boldly bear witness to the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hymn 101 -- *Away in a Manger* – vss. 1 & 2

Away in a manger, no crib for his bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay;
the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky,
and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

A Reading from the Prophecy of Isaiah -- Chapter 61

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; who has clothed me with the garments of salvation, and has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland; as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until vindication shines out like the dawn, and salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. This is the Word of the Lord.

LEVAS Hymn 21 – Go Tell It on the Mountain – Vss. 1 & 2

Go, tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere;
go, tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born.

While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night,
behold, throughout the heavens
there shone a holy light.

The shepherds feared and trembled
when lo! above the earth
rang out the angel chorus
that hailed our Savior's birth.

A Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians – Chapter 4

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under

the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. This is the Word of the Lord.

Hymn 115 – to Greensleeves – Vss. 1 & 3

What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?

This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud,
the babe, the son of Mary.

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh,
Come, peasant, king, to own him;
The King of kings salvation brings; let loving hearts enthrone him.

A Reading from the Gospel According to Luke – Chapter 2

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's

father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and all who knew him. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Nunc Dimittis (#671-1940)

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace* According to thy word.

For mine eyes have seen thy salvation* Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles* And to be the glory of thy people Israel.

Praise to the Creator and to the Child* And to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be* World without end, Amen.

Just two days ago we celebrated the anniversary of the birth of the baby whose birth was the coming of God into the world in a human form. The birth was an historical event, on a specific date, in a specific year, in a specific place, to a specific family, in a specific social setting. The Greeks at the time of this birth and at the time of the development of a religion around him were appalled at this. A religion should speak in universal and objective terms, it should not be particular and subjective, so that it is accessible to anyone, of any century, of any

country, of any culture, of any social setting. One should not say that this baby, born in this place to that family on that date is God; say, rather, that God is out of time, location, relation, and therefore anyone, anywhere, of any age can worship him (or her.) The objection of the Greeks was called “the scandal of particularity,” and it was a major stumbling block in gaining converts from Hellenic culture. A particularized God has limitations—if he’s here, he’s not there; if he’s now, he’s not then. Christians recognized this, but maintained the Hebraic position. God relates to humans by appearing and working in the world. In this case, He Himself was born into the world to share human life, to model human behavior, and to save us from ourselves. All who relate to God or to Jesus do so from their own particular perspective of time and place, and God/Jesus is relevant to any time and place.

The 3 lessons that we heard today illustrate this very variety of perspective. We hear people from 3 very different times relating to the Christ event. The lessons from Isaiah, Luke, and Galatians each dealt with the Christ, but from very different time perspectives. Isaiah lived long before the birth of Jesus, he looked forward to the future Messiah, the Christ, with hope, longing, trust, eagerness. He says, “...the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.” Without having seen it, he has certainty that God will come as a Messiah.

Luke’s characters, Simeon and Anna, are in the present. Simeon, like Isaiah, was “looking forward to the consolation of Israel,” by which he meant the Messiah, the Christ. And, “Guided by the spirit....Simeon took him (Jesus) in his arms....” Simeon and Anna, too, like Isaiah, their spiritual ancestor, hoped, but they experienced that hope in a more immediate physical way, by seeing, touching, and holding.

Paul, in Galatians, writing perhaps a generation after Jesus’ life was over, looks backward and invests meaning in the particulars he knows of the Jesus story. He had heard of Jesus, and he schematizes or theologizes in this way: “God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.” Lawyer-like, isn’t it? God sent this, from whom, in what state, why, and why that! Nevertheless, that very concision, that ability to pattern the Word in our words is a

spiritual gift that Paul has been given. Like us, Isaiah and Paul never met Jesus, but neither had any hesitation in proclaiming what the meaning of the birth of Jesus would be or was. That 3 writers from different decades, and centuries even, proclaim the birth of Christ as if it was contemporaneous, demonstrates to us the supra-historical nature of the Incarnation.

What we might take from this is that when we live in relation to the Christ is not of the essence. It's not a favored position to be a 1st century Palestinian. The Incarnation means that God manifested Himself in history, and, if so, it had, of course, to be some particular time. But the 1st century event was for the whole world, the universe, and it can be participated in from any time perspective. You can be "looking ahead for," or "seeing right here," or "seeing backward, reflecting." The intrusion of God into His world—the Incarnation—is timeless.

These 3 writers behold Christ not only from different places in time, they also display different feelings and emotions and write in different genres.

Isaiah has felt that God has not always dealt fairly with Israel, maybe going so far as to feeling abused, but now in Isaiah God tells the figure of the Daughter of Zion that she will be vindicated by the very God who cast her aside, and now she ("she" is Israel) will be given a "crown of beauty" and a "royal diadem" for all the other nations to see. Isaiah is proclaiming in the form of hymn or poetic praise a new dawn, a new era, the messianic age. Isaiah now is filled with a sense of fulfillment, he believes in the reality of the "hope of all Israel"—that God will be with them for the future as He has in the past.

--Luke uses a story form in which Simeon and Anna express themselves with awe that the "consolation of Israel" should come in their time. They are overjoyed by being actually present with the child Jesus, and thus perceiving God-with- them.

--What were Paul's feelings, emotions? He was a Jew who was, to say the least, not very receptive to the identification of Jesus with the longed-for Jewish Messiah, but he must have been a very open person,

for he changed his mind. To make this shift in understanding must have been quite a displacement; that sort of life-changing event fraught with awe and wonder. He apprehended that Jesus' life was God's infinity cramped into a finite being, and that that being would both model and save.

It's clear that each one of us relates to the Gospel from our own time, place, culture. Each of us comes to an understanding of our faith from different conditions, talents, desires, emotions, facts. And God, who placed Jesus here, is universal, able to comprehend all our particularities. We understand through the many media of praise, narrative, and theology. Our own religious response varies day by day according to what we are feeling, what we just learned, how we internalize ideas. As Christians, we have, with Isaiah, to get used to hoping without certainty; with Simeon and Anna, seeing and being in the presence of Christ, with perhaps only guessing at meaning, and with Paul, attempting to organize the meaning of his relationship to Christ—all in one religious movement.

Psychologically, the Christian Calendar and Lectionary helps us keep steady and even in attention to all events, theologies, types of literature. The Christian calendar yearly, again and again, recycles the Birth, Death, and Resurrection of the Christ, the varied emotions with which we make these stories our own, and the varied genres in which they are told to us. It keeps us from making idiosyncratic choices focusing on stories we like best. In our lifetime we get 10, 20, 50, 70, 80, (in my case 88) years of Christmases, of Good Fridays, of Easters, and all the related insights in between. Shouldn't we have gotten the point by now? No, because every year we newly hope and await; we see and recognize or maybe fail to; and then when we look back in thought over what we experienced, we have a new context, a new self to do the reflecting, bringing new insights. The year turns, and we do it all over again.

We latter-day Christians get to be Isaiahs, Simeons, Annas, and Pauls, rolled into one. With Isaiah we hope, with Simeon and Anna we see, with Paul we reflect year by year and then day by day, moment by moment. We are asked to hope as if our salvation is not here but coming, then to see and to touch our salvation, and then to make sense

of that salvation and of what meaning it has for the way we conduct ourselves.

And while we yearly, daily, live our lives, knowing we are loved by our creator unconditionally, our Christian work is to model that love to everyone with whom we come in contact, and to teach that love to anyone we teach, and to negotiate the presence of that love in the society in which we live. Christianity is not a unity trip—it isn't trying to pull ourselves up to become one with God. It is a community trip—trying to reach others with the God within us. Trying to let them know that they, too, have God within them. This requires openness, respect.

As we interpret Jesus as the incarnation of God, so we must see the world, too, as the incarnation of God, so that as one does a just act to one of the least, one does it to God. We must try to do this love, to teach this love, to bring the love to the community. In order to do so, we have been given and will be re-fueled by the yearly remembrance, our yearly rehearsal, of the diverse narratives of the source of our faith, hope, and charity.

Prayers

Let us pray. Lord, you have taught us that we are members of one another: Hear our prayer for all who do the tedious, dirty, and dangerous work which is necessary to sustain life and to minister in this pandemic; and grant that all who depend upon their service may remember them with thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

O Lord our Governor, the whole world is filled with your glory: We commend this nation to your merciful care, that we may follow your guidance and live in your peace. Give to the President of the United States, the Governor of this State, and to all in authority, wisdom and strength to know and to do your will. Fill them with the love of truth and righteousness; and make them always remember that they are called to serve this nation in the fear of your righteous judgments; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and governs with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. ***Amen.***

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move in every human heart, and among the people of this land, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that being healed of our divisions we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

Almighty God, you proclaim your truth in every age by many voices: Direct, in our time, we pray, those who speak where many listen and write what many read; that they may do their part in making the heart of this people wise, its mind sound, and its will righteous; to the honor of Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

Hymn 109 -- *The First Noel* - Vss. 1, 2 & 4

The first Nowell the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
in fields where they lay, keeping their sheep,
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw a star shining in the east beyond them far,
and to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night.

This star drew nigh to the northwest, o'er Bethlehem it took its rest,
and there it did both stop and stay
right over the place where Jesus lay.

And now may the blessing of the Lord rest and remain upon us and upon all people in every land, of every tongue; through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and honor, world without end. ***Amen.***