

Christmas 2019  
St. William Champion  
Isaiah 9.1-6///Titus 2.11-14///Luke 2.1-14  
Midnight Mass Readings at all Masses

→like many of you of a certain age....I remember well the first time I heard this gospel proclaimed to me – and it wasn't in church.

→it was in my parents living room...watching an 22 –inch Magnavox color TV.///

→and the person proclaiming the gospel wasn't a priest or minister...it wasn't an actor or storyteller....

→instead it was a little boy with a blanket...named Linus...and the show was “A Charlie Brown Christmas”....and since then I have watched that show every year.

→interestingly... a few weeks ago I came across a documentary about Charles Schulz, the creator of “Peanuts” and he talked about how that show came about...and the battles he had to fight with CBS to get it on the air.

→[you see] the television executives were nervous about **NOT** having a laugh track added to the program....they were nervous about using real children for the character's voices...

→**and** they were **REALLY** nervous about having that piece of scripture included in the show....God forbid that you should have a Christmas special that actually mentions the birth of Christ!

→but Charles Schulz stuck to his guns....and the result....became one of television's most beloved and popular Christmas specials...

→it lives on even today....a couple weeks ago...when it was shown...it was one of the highest rated programs on television for that week...

→about 20 million people watched...including myself....

→[and] it is a humbling reminder to those of us to walk to a pulpit every week...that sometimes the most powerful pulpit isn't a pulpit at all...and often the most effective preacher isn't actually a preacher.

PAUSE

→hearing this gospel once again tonight [this morning]...I find myself marveling at its power

→what is it about Luke's telling of the nativity story that makes it so enduring and endearing....

→because year after year, century after century, whether on television or in church...we are drawn to this story

→it is, for so many of us...THE Christmas story!

→perhaps...part of the draw is the cast of characters Luke assembles...

→Luke is the only evangelist who was not Jewish and so his gospel is beautifully inclusive

→he is sometimes considered the evangelist for the outsider and outcast....

→and so in his birth narrative you have everyone...Jesus, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, angels and even Caesar is mentioned...

→the only ones who don't appear are the three wise men...but they will pop up on their own holiday in the coming weeks...

PAUSE

→in this narrative...you really do see the world spread before us...and everyone is welcomed at the stable...

→but beyond this setting and sentiment...there is a truth here that strikes at the very heart of every believing Christian....and that truth defines Christmas

→it happens in the middle of the gospel...in the very first words that are spoken

**→do not be afraid...**

→and then it gets even better....*"for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people...a savior has been born for you who is Christ the Lord."*

→these are the words we have been longing to hear...and with this moment the course of human history changes forever....

→God had become one of us...the savior's very name proclaims the incredible truth that no one ever thought possible..... "Emmanuel".....*God is with us*

→it is a stunning and almost overwhelming thought...and yet we are told:

**→do not be afraid**

→across two thousand years...those words reach out to us in joy, hope and consolation...no matter who you are....where you live....or what your circumstances may be...

--this is what truly matters.....do not be afraid

→do not be afraid....to those in service to our country whether they be in Pensacola or on the other side of the world

→do not be afraid...to those searching for work...and those facing uncertain challenges

→do not be afraid...to those who are sick and suffering...the lonely and lost...[and] to those who might feel abandoned

→do not be afraid

...because even in this darkest of nights...there is now a bright light...a savior has been born who is Christ the Lord...and he is now our hope

→so do not be afraid...because on this night [day] good news of great joy is proclaimed to you and me...to all people everywhere

→a savior has been born...and he continues to be born in our hearts...if only we allow it to happen...

→and **that**...I believe...is the great power of Christmas...the reason why year after year this beautiful passage from Luke resonates with each one of us...

→Christmas is about redemption...but it is also about God's overpowering love for us

→His reassurance to a troubled, frightened, world that He is with us, through everything that might come our way

→he dreams with us...struggles with us...grieves with us...and he hopes with us

→remember his name... "Emmanuel"...God is with us...

→so.... **do not be afraid**...

→and in the immortal words of that great philosopher, Linus Van Pelt:

**"That** is what Christmas is all about...Charlie Brown