

Christmass Eve
St. Luke 2: 1-20
St. George's Episcopal Church
December 24th, 2018
Fr. Chris

A Hymn for Our Times and for Christmass

“In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;

Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter,
Long ago.”

It is the bleak mid-winter, and, ‘baby, it’s cold outside!’ This morning’s snow may have melted, but perhaps more lies ahead this winter. The darkest days of our year have arrived. Uncertainty abounds. The stress of holiday preparations has come to a screeching halt.

Good news! Peace on earth replaces all of this.

The long expected Jesus is here:

“Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set your people free;
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.”

It would seem to some that God would fail human expectations. However, in hindsight, we realize that God has far exceeded them. The gift of God to us this Christmas is beyond comprehension.

We receive another Christmass as a gift. Each one is a blessing to us. Most of all Christmass is a gift to inspire us to gather with friends and family, which is what life is all about at its core.

- The gift of Christmass is Peace, Quiet.
- The gift of Christmass is Love.
- The gift of Christmass is a caring, loving God, trying to reach out to us.
- The gift of Christmass is a homeless, vulnerable, humble God in the person of the baby Jesus.

In the bleak mid-winter, when things seem overwhelming, dark and dreary, I must confess that increasingly I have been turning to the Hallmark Christmass Channel on cable. Hallmark Movies replace the shrill tenor of content on the so-called 24-hour news channels. They have been a respite to remind us of goodness, kindness, forgiveness and love are the happy ending of a life well lived and a Christmass well observed. These are not Pollyanna. These are not pie in the sky. These values are no joke to scoff at: these values are our Christian values. These are the values to which we aspire and to which we are called to live, to make them the fabric of who we are.

And so Christmass is about generosity and gift giving. The principle generosity is the gift God gives to us tonight. Down through the ages this gift, the gifts of the Wisemen, and generosity, have been hallmarks of the season and its observance and celebration. For centuries it is a time of giving gifts to employers, and receiving gifts from employers. This is the origin of “Boxing Day” on December 26th. Then came gifts to children, the innocent among us who remind us of this night. Through generosity we intend to infect them with these values and the same wonder those shepherds felt that first winter’s night while they tended their flocks and looked up in the sky and discovered a hope, a gift, a star of this promise.

And so it is Christmass... and what blessings and traditions do we have? Here are some common ones:

- Carols—with hearts singing with great joy and gratitude!
- Lights—lighting up the way of hope in the darkness!
- Greens—reminding us of the triumph of life over death and defeat.
- Red Decorations—The cost of God’s love, forever the color of new life.
- The Christmass Tree—the tree in the Garden of Eden the fruit of which we ate long ago, and also the tree atop Calvary, whose fruit is life itself, coursing in our veins.
- The Wreath—As awarded in athletic contests, the ancient sign of the victory of Jesus over sin and death and darkness, and the symbol of God’s eternal nature, no beginning and no end.
- Bearded Figure—Reminds us of a God of love, generosity, mercy, kindness, as opposed to a God of Judgment even when God knows who is naughty or nice.
- Feast--We sit at God’s Table. He is the Host of the Christmas Feast, yet it is God serving us and providing the food for the banquet. With joy, warmth and happiness, we partake!
- Hearth and Home—The warmth of safety in God’s embrace.
- The Presents—Remind us not only of generosity, but that the greatest gift we can

give to others is to be present and not distracted from them.

- The Babe in a Manger—Innocence, Vulnerability, Life and real Hope lie ahead for all of us

Those who come to see the First Nativity would be old when Jesus began his public ministry at the Jordan River to reveal Godself and God's purpose. Yet still they came to see what had been long expected and awaited! They came to see God's promise fulfilled before them, with their own eyes to be witnesses that God kept God's word.

Indeed, this is the day we remember Christ's birth. What can we possibly give him? For a suggestion, consider these thoughts from the last verse of Hymn 112, verse 4: (where I began my remarks this evening)

“What can I give him—as poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring him a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what can I give him, give my heart.”

And so this Christmas, I invite you to give God your heart, and to give those you love, your friends and family, your heart, and if by chance, a stranger too. AMEN.