

Church of the Divine Love

Sermon Christmas Dec 25 2023

Isaiah 9: 2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14, [15-20].

CHRISTMAS DAY

DECEMBER 25, 2023 10:15 AM

HOLY EUCHARIST, RITE II

Please observe silence

Prayer before worship – on insert

THE WORD OF GOD

Processional Hymn **#100 – Joy to the world!**

Opening Acclamation page 355

Collect for Purity page 355

Gloria (sung) page 356

Collect of the Day - lectionary sheet insert

First Lesson: **Isaiah 9:2-7**

Psalm 96

Second Lesson: **Titus 2:11-14**

Gradual Hymn **#109 – The first Nowell**

Gospel: **Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)**

Sermon – The Rev. Jean Lenord Quatorze (printed on insert)

The Nicene Creed page 358

Prayers of the People, Form IV page 388

The Peace

Welcome and Announcements

THE HOLY COMMUNION

Offertory Hymn **#105 – God rest you merry, gentlemen**

Doxology (sung)

The Great Thanksgiving:

Eucharistic Prayer B page 367

Sanctus (S-130 in hymnal) page 367

Hymn during Consecration printed on insert

The Lord's Prayer page 364

The Breaking of the Bread, Anthem & Prayer page 337

The Communion of the People

Communion Hymn – **Christmas Hallelujah** (on insert)

Post Communion Prayer page 365

Prayer for Peace – on insert

Prayer of St. Francis page 833

Dismissal Hymn **#96 – Angels we have heard on high**

Dismissal

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

I have no intention of trying to explain Christmas tonight. I don't know how. I can't explain it. It just doesn't make sense. The gift of Christmas cannot be explained or understood by logic, the rational mind, or our various theologies and doctrines. It can only be experienced, and that's what I want us to do tonight. I want us to experience Christmas.

What do you imagine the shepherds told them? Did they talk about standing in a light of divine presence? Did they admit there were terrified? Did they talk about the angel's announcement of "good news of great joy for all the people?" Maybe they said that they had heard a choir of angels praising God. I wonder if they looked at the child lying in a manger and said, "The angel told us about him. That's the one we've been waiting for. "I don't know exactly what the shepherds told them I only know that whatever it was it left those who heard it filled with awe, in wonder, and inspired. They were amazed. What is so amazing about this story that two thousand years later we are still telling it? What is so amazing that we come back year after year to hear a story we've already heard and probably know by heart? What about this story amazes you tonight?

I'm not asking about your amazement at what happened to the shepherds, Mary, or Joseph. I want us to push through the sentimentality of the story to its power and meaning for our lives tonight. I'm asking about how this story is amazing for you, in your life and circumstances tonight. I don't want you to tell their amazing story. I want you to tell your amazing story. Is it a story about recovering hope when you thought all was lost, finding freedom and forgiveness of past guilt and regret, or facing and moving through your fear? Maybe it's a story of discovering light, meaning, and direction for your life when you were walking in darkness, or getting your life turned around and going in a new direction. Maybe your amazing story is about experiencing peace in a time of turmoil or getting through another day when you didn't think you could even get out of bed that morning. It might be a story about how your life was put back together when you weren't sure if you even had all the pieces. Maybe it's a story about love and intimacy, abundance and gratitude, healing and wholeness. Maybe it's a story about feeling a presence greater than and from beyond yourself. Maybe it's a story about looking in the face of the child lying in a manger and recognizing yourself. Every one of those and a thousand others like them is an amazing story of Christmas and they all begin with the child lying in a manger. We come this night to once again receive that child into the manger of our own lives.

This child we receive and celebrate tonight is the sign of God's yes to you and me. This child is the embodiment of God's yes to all people. This child will spend the rest of his life saying, "Yes:" yes to the poor, yes to the hungry, yes to the weeping, yes to the sinner, yes to the pure in heart, yes to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, yes to the peacemakers, yes to the outsiders, yes to the wedding couple who ran out of wine, yes to the lepers, yes to the prostitutes and tax collectors, yes to the 5000, yes to the demon possessed, yes to the woman caught in adultery, yes to Lazarus, yes to the woman at the well, yes to blind Bartimaeus, yes to the hemorrhaging woman, yes to the centurion's servant, yes to the widows, yes to the paralyzed man, yes to the sick and suffering, yes to Nicodemus, yes to Mary and Martha, yes to Peter, James, and John, yes to Thomas, yes to Judas, and yes to you and me.

Jesus is God's yes to us and the world. Regardless of who you are, where you are from, what you have done or left undone, or what is happening in your life today, you get a yes. There is no one who does not get a yes. That yes is the gift of Christmas and it is unconditional. It is pure gift. That yes comes to us as love, acceptance, forgiveness, presence. And God's yes to you and me always comes without an if, a

when, or a why. God's yes, the Christmas gift, never comes wrapped in an economy of transaction. Let me explain what I mean by that. We live in a world in which you pay for what you want. We're expected to return the favor, pay off the debt, or reciprocate in some way. We write contracts to ensure that the books will remain balanced. In short, you get what you pay for. That is not God's world or God's way. God does not love if you are worthy of being loved. God loves unconditionally. God does not accept when you have proven yourself acceptable. God's acceptance is unconditional. God does not forgive after you have changed your ways. God just forgives. God does not show up because you said your prayers or had enough faith. God's presence is without conditions. There are no prerequisites to God's yes. That's the gift of this night; God's unconditional yes.

It doesn't matter who you are, why you are here, or what has and has not happened in your life the past year, the angel's announcement of "good news of great joy for all the people" is a promise that all of us are given and have an amazing story. And sometimes the most amazing thing about that story is that it is happening even when we don't see it or can't yet believe it. What is the story you would make known about the child? How has that story grown in you? Is it still growing in you? If not, why not? In what ways does it continue to change and challenge you? The amazing story began with the shepherds but it can only continue with us. It is now your story and my story. And in whatever ways it penetrates our hearts, our minds, our emotions, all that we love and hold as dear, it will always be a story that is simply amazing.

The Christmas story, that amazing story of God with us, does not end with the birth of Jesus. That's when it begins. And it's not simply a story to tell, it's a story to live. Let's vow this night to live that story to its fullest, to open ourselves to the world and word of the shepherds, and to allow our lives, words, and actions to become the story. Don't you want to be amazed and amazing? Merry Christmas. Merry amazing Christmas to all of you. **Amen!**