

Advent 4 sermon December 22 2024

The 4th Sunday of Advent. We're getting closer, aren't we, to observing the birth of Jesus, and the importance of this event for the whole Creation, including you and me.

Well, just what is this importance? Why are we moved so deeply by the Christmas Story? Let me suggest three reasons, in no particular order.

Reason One. The birth of Jesus is not just a story of Mary and Joseph and their new child. No, the birth of Jesus is far more comprehensive than two parents and a newborn. We're talking about all of human history: past, present and future. And about who was responsible for this history and who continues to be engaged in it. And will see it through to some kind of conclusion.

You and I are born **curious**. We wonder about things, including how we as individuals and as a collection of individuals fit in. Fit in the past. Fit in the present. Fit in the future. What is life in general all about? And what are our particular lives all about?

Yes, we are **curious** creatures.

Reason Two for why the Christmas Story resonates with us. We are not just curious. We are **anxious**. What does it all mean? Where do we fit in? How soon will we find out? What happens next? And will we be ready for the "next"? And, if not ready, are we even slightly prepared to deal at all with what might be? We worry about these issues, don't we? And we're not just curious. We are **anxious** creatures. We stay busy. We challenge ourselves. We give thanks for a sense of being where we are and with whom we are. And where there seem to be gaps between hope and reality, we dream of filling those gaps ourselves or with the help of others.

Which takes us to **strategies**. Reason Three. Yes, we are **curious** and we are **anxious**. And how do we handle anxiety? We strategize. Yes, at our best we are **strategic creatures**. We set goals and we pursue those goals. And we feel better when we seem to be on track. And we feel worse when we seem to be off track.

So we adopt or develop ways of getting back on track, including, of all things, church attendance. Oh yes, there are vacations, there are hobbies, there is community service, there is a lawn to mow. But these outlets for our curiosity and anxiety seem to fall short of bringing peace to ourselves and others. Something is missing. Or perhaps **Someone** – capital S - is missing.

Where is the void? We spend a lot of time wrestling with this question, don't we? And one of the ways we wrestle with the unknown is looking into the possibility that at some level, well beyond our pay grade, there really is an answer. That's where we are right now. And with this answer, comes the command to share the answer. That's a critical step also, isn't it? But it's not always easy.

You and I in this setting would say yes, definitely. We don't have to be here. We're here by choice. And it's a choice that has a lot of thought behind it. Now, some of this thought is skepticism. We are critical thinkers after all. But often – and this congregation is an example – our skepticism is subject to faith, to belief, to conviction, to experimentation, to satisfaction.

Indeed, for us, faith makes perfect sense. Something, Someone, is responsible for life, including our lives. And, not just **responsible for**, but **supportive of**. God with us. God with us as Creator. God with us as Son. God with us as Holy Spirit.

This sense of support is attributable to Someone. We didn't invent it. It came to us from Somewhere. We sense this Someone and **give this Someone a name**: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We also know this Someone as our teacher, our friend, our challenger, and, **yes, our Savior**.

It's a pretty special relationship, isn't it. The Creator of the Universe with us.

Hard to believe. But believe we do. And we do so primarily because, by God's design, you and I are **reachers**. And also by God's design, we are **receivers**. Not inventors of God's Love, but **recipients** of God's love. And once received and processed, we are **sharers** of God's Love.

And here we are. Continuing to reach and continuing to receive and continuing to share and, always, remembering to give thanks to the Lord. Our lesson today

from the Prophet Micah ends with this description of the outcome of doing the Lord's work: "And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace."

This desirable outcome is made possible by the Creator offering choices, and the likes of you and me responding to those choices. We reach and we receive. And we reach again and again, and we receive again and again. That's the nature of our pursuit of Truth. Well worth a profound "Thank you." And here we are. We **reach**, we **receive**, and yes we **share**, and yes we give thanks. And, as we do this, God responds with "Well done, good and faithful servants."

Thank you, Lord. It is our **privilege**. Amen.

Morning Prayer – Advent 4 – December 22, 2024

Hymn 76, stanzas 1-3

On Jordan's Bank

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh;
awake and hearken, for he brings glad tidings of the King of kings.

Then cleansed be every breast from sin; make straight the way for God within,
and let each heart prepare a home where such a mighty guest may come.

For thou art our salvation, Lord, our refuge and our great reward;
without thy grace we waste away like flowers that wither and decay.

BCP - Page 39 – Greeting

This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

BCP – Pages 41 – Invitation to Confession

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God our heavenly Father, to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things that are necessary for our life and our salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship him, let us kneel or sit in silence, and with penitent and obedient hearts confess our sins, that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite good and mercy.

BCP – Pages 41-42 – Confession and Absolution – kneeling or sitting

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.

But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, restore thou those who are penitent, according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord; and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. *Amen.*

*The Almighty and merciful Lord grant **us** absolution and remission of all **our** sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit. Amen.*

BCP – Page 44 – Venite

O come, let us sing unto the Lord;
 let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving,
 and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great God,
 and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are all the corners of the earth,
 and the strength of the hills is his also.
The sea is his, and he made it,
 and his hands prepared the dry land.
O come, let us worship and fall down
 and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is the Lord our God,
 and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.
O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
 let the whole earth stand in awe of him.
For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth,
 and with righteousness to judge the world and the peoples with his truth.

Canticle 3: The Song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55)

My soul doth magnify the Lord,
 and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.
For hath regarded
 the lowliness of his handmaiden.
For behold from henceforth
 all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty magnified me,
 and holy is his Name.
And his mercy is on them that fear him
 throughout all generations.
He hath showed strength with his arm;
 he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat,
 and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things,
 and the rich he hath sent empty away.

He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel,
as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

First Reading: Micah 5:2-5a

You, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10

When Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God (in the scroll of the book it is written of me).'" When he said above, you have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "See, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Hymn 59, stanzas 1-3

Hark! a thrilling voice is sounding: "Christ is nigh," it seems to say,
Christ, our sun, all sloth dispelling, shine upon the morning skies.
"Cast away the works of darkness, O ye children of the day."

Wakened by the solemn warning, from earth's bondage let us rise;
Christ our Sun, all sloth dispelling, shines upon the morning skies.

Lo! the Lamb, so long expected, comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow, one and all to to be forgiven.

So when next he comes with glory, and the world is wrapped in fear,
May he with his mercy shield us, and with words of love draw nearl.

Honor, glory, might and blessing to the Father and the Son,
With the everlasting Spirit while unending ages run.

Gospel: Luke 1:39-55

The Holy Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ, according to Luke.
Glory to you, Lord Christ.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believe that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their throne and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestor, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

The Gospel of the Lord. *Praise be to you, O Christ.*

Sermon – The Rev. Charles Rowins

BCP – page 53 - The Apostles' Creed - standing

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand
of God the Father Almighty.
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

BCP – page 54 – the Lord's Prayer

The Lord be with you. *And with thy spirit.* Kneeling or sitting, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

BCP – page 55 – Suffrages A

O Lord, show thy mercy upon us;
And grant us thy salvation.
Endue thy ministers with righteousness;
And make thy chosen people joyful.

Give peace, O Lord in all the world;
For only in thee can we live in safety.
Lord, keep this nation under thy care;
And guide us in the way of justice and truth.
Let thy way be known upon earth;
Thy saving health among all nations.
Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;
Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.
Create in us clean hearts, O God;
And sustain us with thy Holy Spirit.

Collect for Fourth Sunday of Advent

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

BCP – page 58 - The General Thanksgiving

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants
do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-
kindness to us and to all men.*
*We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord
Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.*
*And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our
hearts we may be unfeignedly thankful; and that we show forth thy praise, not
only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by
walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus
Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory,
world without end. Amen.*

BCP – page 59 – Prayer of St. Chrysostom

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication unto thee, and hast promised through thy well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name thou wilt be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. *Amen.*

Announcements

Hymn 717 - America – portions of stanzas 1 and 3 - standing

*My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;
land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside
let freedom ring.*

BCP – page 834 – Prayer for After Worship – remain standing

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the words which we have heard this day with our outward ears, may, through thy grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honor and praise of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

BCP – page 59 – The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. *Amen.*

Hymn 61

“Sleepers, wake!” A voice astounds us, the shout of rampart guards surround us:
“Awake, Jerusalem, arise!” Midnight’s peace their cry has broken, their urgent
summons clearly spoken : “The time has come, O maidens wise!
Rise up, and give us light; the Bridegroom is in sight. Alleluia!
Your lamps prepare and hasten there, that you the wedding feast may share.”

Zion hears the watchmen singing; her heart with joyful hope is springing,
she wakes and hurries through the night. Forth he comes, her Bridegroom glorious
in strength of grace, in truth victorious: her star is risen, her light grows bright.
Now come, most worthy Lord, God’s Son, Incarnate Word, Alleluia!
We follow all and heed your call to come into the banquet hall.

Lamb of God, the heavens adore you; let saints and angels sing before you,
as harps and cymbals swell the sound. Twelve great pearls, the city’s portals:
through them we stream to join the immortals as we with joy your throne surround
No eye has known the sight, no ear heard such delight: Alleluia!
Therefore we sing to greet our King; for ever let our praises ring.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!