

Sermon, December 27, 2015

I heard a rumor about Christmas as recently as Thursday of this week. It came over the radio from the wonderful annual Christmas Lessons and Carols Service streamed live from Cambridge, England. This year I remembered when to turn the radio on, so I was able to hear this beautiful service. You know how we engaged in Advent Lessons and Carols here in Grace Church, Galena a mere week ago.

Christmas Lessons and Carols are different, in that the readings and the music go on past where we left off in our Advent celebration. They go on past the birth of Christ as baby Jesus in the manger, the concrete story we celebrated here on Thursday afternoon, complete with children as Mary, Joseph, angels and a shepherd.

The final lesson in the Lessons and Carols sung in Cambridge was the Gospel for this morning. In the introduction to the lesson, the reader, in introducing the lesson, said something to the effect that this is “the conclusion of Christmas.”

Well, can't say I agree. It's mere rumor that the lesson marks the conclusion of Christmas.

First, though, let us admit that just as the nativity, so fully drawn by the Gospel of Luke we read this year, tells us decisively about the humanity of Jesus and the willingness of God to enter, fully, our difficult, beautiful, war torn, human life; so the prologue to the Gospel of John we heard this morning tells us decisively about the Divinity of Jesus.

And it all comes together in the One born in Bethlehem.

The epitome of helpless humanity, a newborn, totally dependent on the care of flawed, young, faithful parents, is also the living breathing Word of God, Word from before creation to the second coming when time as we know it will be over and we shall all be changed.

But hearing this does not signal the conclusion of Christmas. I would stomp out that rumor.

We Christians live in a universe we know to be inhabited by surprise, surprise hosted by the creator of it all.

The world thought the crucifixion was the end of the story of Jesus ( and his followers), God's surprise came three days later.

The crucifixion was not an end but the prologue to a new beginning.

So too, I think, the prologue to the Gospel of John, “In the beginning was the Word...” is not the conclusion of Christmas but the beginning of our new life, our life in which we

begin to realize what that Incarnation was all about, and an invitation to take the glorious truth of the stable and expand it into our time.

It's not easy. This prologue is written around a hundred years after the actual stable birth. These dates, like so much of tracing the origins and timing of scripture, is a tricky business.

The point is, it took time. It took time, a lot of time, for the followers of Christ to understand fully, or to act on what they did not "understand" in a left brain sense, but knew through the experience of living in Christian community, how their lives had been changed, what had happened in Bethlehem.

The implications of the birth in the stable were, and are, not always clear.

But for us as disciples it is our job to see as clearly as we can. Once we know Christ is life and light, then we become the bringers of light in this life, 2015, 2016 and as much beyond that as we can.

There is still no room in the Inn, for many:  
 witness the crinkly mylar blankets we see refugees wrap around themselves as they huddle on the shores of a Grecian island;  
 witness the faces of children, like the baby Jesus needing care, but separated from their parents by borders they had no part in making;  
 witness the chaos and cruel loss of life in any war theatre you can mention these days — Syria, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, Ukraine, and I would include Chicago, the names go on and on.  
 And it is a truth of the world we live in.

Hear too, this truth:  
 "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,..full of grace and truth." I know that you know this; for you are here this morning. Here's how the translator Eugene Peterson puts it:

The Word became flesh and blood,  
                   and moved into the neighborhood.  
 We saw the glory with our own eyes,  
                   the one-of-a-kind glory,  
                   like Father, like Son,  
 Generous inside and out,  
                   true from start to finish.

And now, my friends, it is for us to keep the neighborhood lighted. It is God who shows us how.

Pray about it. Christmas has not concluded, it has but gloriously begun.

- [Isaiah 61:10-62:3](#)
- [Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7](#)
- [John 1:1-18](#)
- [Psalm 147 or 147:13-21](#)