

Sermon
Christmas Lessons and Carols Year B
January 3rd, 2021

Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN

Sermon:

The best part about Christmas is the surprises.

Not the kind that we find under the Christmas tree.

But the kind we find when we let Christmas into our hearts.

The Christmas story begins, really, with the Annunciation.

In Luke's Gospel, the Angel Gabriel says to Mary,

“Greetings, favored one! The Lord God is with you.”

Lukeⁱ tells us that Mary was greatly troubled by these words.

She was surprised and dismayed.

And no wonder:

Although Mary was an unschooled virgin Jewish peasant girl,

According to the Angel,

was about to be an unwed mother.

Mary, living in Nazareth, the Dustbowl of the Roman Empire,

Was about to be utterly un-marriageable.

A complete disgrace.

But, Amazingly her parents found someone to marry her.ⁱⁱ

So, things were starting to look up, when Mary and her fiancé
had to schlep 90 miles, on foot, to Bethlehem
so they could register to pay Rome's taxes.

And then, right after they got to Bethlehem, the baby came.
True, the accommodations weren't great,
but they could have been worse.
There was certainly warm well water, and
probably a mid-wife.
No hot water, no soft pillows, no meds, no Lamaze.
But at least a bed of straw.

Eventually they had guests: shepherds and the "Three Wise Men"ⁱⁱⁱ.
The Wise Men presented symbolic gifts.
They must have kissed Baby Jesus, and
complimented the parents on a handsome, strong boy,
Maybe they hired someone to clean up the stable.
Somebody definitely made a casserole.

And that's how the earthly Kingdom of God began.^{iv}
30 years later Mary's grown-up baby boy said "Follow Me",
And they did!
Jesus talked about launching the Kingdom of God,
Right here. Right now.

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After dying in a late night car crash, three frat brothers went to Heaven, for orientation.

The angel-in-charge said to them:

“When you are in the casket, and you friends and family are looking at you laying there, what you would like to hear them say about you?”

One guy popped up and said, “I want to hear them say I was going to be one of the greatest doctors of my time”.

The second guy said, “I want to hear them say I was a wonderful husband and school teacher, who made a huge difference for the next generation of children.”

The last guy stared quietly out the window, and thought for a moment.

“I’d want to hear them say...LOOK! HE’S MOVING!!!”

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The Angel asked the boys about what they wanted.

So, they talked about themselves.

But the Kingdom of God isn’t about us^v. It’s about everybody else.

When Jesus mentioned the “kingdom of God”,

He didn’t mean “utopia”. He didn’t mean “heaven”. ^{vi}

What did Jesus mean when he mentioned the Kingdom of Heaven?

He was talking about when we are forgiven

and when we forgive others. ^{vii}

Our return from exile ...

... thy kingdom come, thy will be done,...

forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those

who trespass against us. ^{viii}

Jesus focused on the poor and the outcast.

He touched the untouchable. He welcomed the poor.

All of creation bears the mark of Jesus' redemption!

Isn't that we sense God in the sea, and the Piney Woods,

The Hill Country, Big Bend, The Rivers,

The Mountains, the Sky, and the Stars?

The Kingdom of God broke into our world through the Cross.

And that work continues.

Because we are Christians,

We are called to live in the kingdom

and to do the Holy work we are called to do.

In the future kingdom there will be reconciliation, and shalom.^{ix}

The Lion shall lay down with the Lamb.

All will be wonderfully restored.

But *it starts now!*

There is plenty to do right here at St. Christopher's..

There are lots of ways that you can support our work.

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As a guy was rushing out of church one Christmas day,

the priest grabbed him by the hand ...

The Priest said to the man,

"You've got to join the Army of the Lord!"

And the guy replied,

"I'm already in the Army of the Lord, Father."

"Well then", the priest said,

"how come I only see you on Christmas and Easter?"

The guy drew close the priest and whispered in his ear:

"I'm in the secret service."

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The kingdom of God is in real life. It's a new reality. A new life.

A new way of being human. We've got to live it.

Boldly. Not secretly.

We need to let the world know that we are Christians, by our love:

- And give someone a socially distant hug.
- Say a prayer for someone you don't like.
- Feed someone who is hungry. Hug a tree.

Welcome the Kingdom this Christmas.

-AMEN

ⁱ ... the great physician and companion of St. Paul.

ⁱⁱ But only after the baby was born healthy and stayed alive...

ⁱⁱⁱ Some say they got their first. The Bible says they stopped in Jerusalem and asked for directions.

^{iv} The "Church", in all its various iterations, came 1500 years later. But it is still here. Right here. Right now.

^v The point is that in our culture we focus on ourselves, as individuals. That wasn't the way it was in 30 AD.

^{vi} 1st century Jews had Messianic expectations. For them the "kingdom of God" meant a return to the Promised Land, the restoration of a Davidic Kingdom, the defeat of Israel's enemies and basking in the Glory of The Lord. The Temple powers had all that in mind, When they conspired against Jesus. So that wasn't what Jesus was talking about.

^{vii}

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be 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.

^{viii}

Jesus calls all of us in from exile. We stumble. We all fall short. But he calls us anyway!

^{ix} The absence of indebtedness between one person and another.