

December 24, 2017

Christmas Service

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

AMEN.

SERMON

When I was growing up as a child, one of my favorite services of the whole church year was Christmas Eve. It was a special time. And to me was even more special than Good Friday or Easter, and the other really major holidays that the church observed. Christmas Eve was special to me because of the quiet, because of that moment of the angels coming to the shepherds. It just seemed like it was the beginning of things for me. And to go to church at the 11:00 service, to have the church filled with people, to hear the familiar Christmas carols, to hear the story again, to receive communion, and to know that what was said in the story began something terribly, terribly important that has lasted for over 2000 years. It just touched me, and it still touches me.

As I got older and especially after I went to seminary and was ordained, I was surprised to find out that a lot of the church really does not focus much on Christmas. It focuses on Lent, Good Friday, Holy Week. It really focuses on the resurrection. How the importance of Jesus dying on the cross for the sins of the world. I was shocked to find that even though I went to the Episcopal church service on Christmas Eve every year, that some churches did not bother to have Christmas services at all. If it did not fall on a Sunday, they simply did not have a Christmas service. That just blew me away that, so many protestant denominations never really recognized the birth.

Why do we place so much emphasis on that? Why was that so important for me, and continues to be so important to me, why is it so important in the Episcopal church? And for me it is because that moment is unique in all of creation, and in all of time.

This morning and this is an unusual year that we celebrated the fourth Sunday of Advent earlier today. And the gospel reading for the fourth Sunday of Advent, for those of you who might not have gone to church this morning, was Gabriel coming to Mary. And telling her that she had been chosen to bear the son of God. And her response was one of faith, one of I am your servant. Let it be to me as you have said. A willingness to allow God to come be with her, in her, in that special way. For her to bear the Savior of the world, into the world.

And now we're celebrating that birth, the child that is both human and divine. Unique in all of creation. Unique in all of time. Jesus, the Christ, the one that was foretold, the one that came about because humanity and divinity came together in that very unique way, in that very special moment. And now we are celebrating that birth. The beginning of that life in the world.

Jesus first glimpses at creation, at Mother Mary, at Joseph who will help raise him. The people who have come and the shepherds who have heard from the angels, and Mary hearing those words that they are sharing with her. With Joseph, with all the people who have turned out because a birth at that time was a significant event. Being away from home, being away from family. The people turned out to help provide for this couple who were having their first child. Imagine that beginning.

You see, none of what Jesus accomplished once he was baptized by John and starting his teaching ministry, and going through the passion, and dying on the cross, and being raised from the dead would ever

have been possible except for this moment. And we know so little about it. We have just that beginning. And the truth that this child is different from all other children. That this is an act of God with the acceptance of humanity. It is God placing himself into our hands. It is the ultimate act of love, and it is the ultimate act of trust in the goodness of humanity.

He come to us not as all-powerful God but as a baby. A newborn who has no way to defend himself. Is dependent upon the love, care, and nurture of human mother and father. And the people who would come and help to be a part of that life. We have this great moment of birth. And then we do not hear anything else for such a long time. Have you ever thought what Jesus' early childhood might have been like? We have the one story of him being 12 years old, going to Jerusalem, talking to the rabbis, questioning them the leaders. But Jesus lived every day. Son of God, go clean your room! Son of God, and yet experiencing what it is to be with people who love and care for you. Being around people who could care less about who you are and what you are doing. People who for whatever reason might have decided that they did not like this little punk called Jesus. But he lived that life to experience all that we experience.

So that he could ultimately take all of that experience to help teach what it is to be the child of God. Because he was going to issue the invitation for all of us to become children of God. This beginning and this life that we hear so little about until he is 30 was to take all of life as we live it. To experience it so that it could all be redeemed. So that he could be not another teacher. Not another prophet but Savior. That is how he was announced by the angels.

The people of Israel were looking for a Messiah, a Christ, a leader, a king. What they got was so much more. And it was announced on that

night of his birth. For unto you is born a Savior, who is Christ the Messiah. That is who we worship. That is who we listen to, we find life in, we find how we are called to be in relationship with God. That is what Jesus is all about and we know so little about that young life. But what we do know is that he began that night, he experienced all that we experience. He stayed in relationship, in obedience to God who was a part of his life from the very beginning. And he took all of that and he redeemed it all for our sake.

The death, the resurrection, that was a culmination. Tonight, we celebrate the beginning. That moment is the moment that each of us have experienced at some point in our life. That point of beginning and knowing that God is true. That point of beginning in knowing that God's love for me, God's love for you, God's love for each person throughout creation is full and unconditional. That this beginning event has led to the hope and salvation for all people. That is what we celebrate this night.

To remember our beginnings as well. To know that we have been born as Jesus was born in relationship with God. That we live our life listening for that voice to show us the way. Trying to follow the direction of the Most High and knowing that even when we fail, we have this gift. The gift of a Savior. The gift that says I love you so much I will not allow you to fail. I will not allow you to fall short. I will make up for all the times that you do fail, and I will redeem them. I will restore all of life. I will bring you to the Father. Because your Father's love is complete. Your Father's love is unconditional. And your Father's love will bring you home.