

“This is Christmas”

Why do we come to church on Christmas Eve? There are many reasons some mundane, some reverential, and some mystical. For example, some folks come to church on Christmas Eve to show off the new dress or suit and to see what others are wearing. Others come to see the decorations, the pine rope, the poinsettias, and wreaths. Some come to hear the Christmas music and to sing the carols that remind them of their childhood and a simpler time when life was not so complex. This is not a bad thing. I imagine that we all need moments of nostalgia that take us to another time and place particularly if in that place we find hope, joy, peace, love, and a sense of contentment that is often elusive in our daily existence.

Others come to church on Christmas because someone in the family insists. It might be grandma, or mom, or even one of the children. They say, “There will be no gift giving or turkey or punch until we go to church.” Thank goodness for them. They are doing their best to make sure that there is a little bit of Christ in Christmas. They are trying to remind us that the “Reason for the season” is not rampant consumerism, but the birth of our “Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”

A third possibility is to come seeking awe. For weeks on end we have been assaulted with advertisements, commercials, and slogans that try to sell us the most awesome gift of the year. We have been told that unless we go into debt for gadgets, jewels, and automobiles we will disappoint our loved ones. They will not be awed by simple gifts, and will love us less. We know in our hearts that the awesomeness we are being sold is not really all that awesome. It is just another thing that will break, require care and money to maintain, and ultimately weigh us down. We long for something more transcendent and freeing.

That is what we find when we listen to the story of the birth of Jesus. We find a gift for our hearts and souls which is truly beyond measure. We find that the Word of God which was spoken for centuries through the many prophets and psalmists is no longer only words. We find that the Word has been made flesh and now lives in our midst. God’s continual wooing of humanity has taken a new turn in the birth of a little baby to poor parents far removed from the seats of power and wealth.

This gift is truly life-giving and awesome. The proclamation of the angel to the shepherds underscores this. The angel says “behold, I bring **you** good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto **you** is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto **you**; **Ye** shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”¹ It is a powerful and beautiful statement.

As powerful as this statement is, there is one word in it our ears might overlook, but I expect that our hearts eager for awe do not overlook. That word is “you.” The angel says “I bring **you** good tidings,” “unto **you** is born,” and “this shall be a sign unto **you**.” The angel who seems to be speaking only to the shepherds is really speaking to everyone down through the ages to this very night. We are receiving good tidings, a savior, and a sign. Just as the shepherds were in awe so are we.

¹ Luke 2:10-12 KJV

Gene LeCouteur
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4:00 p.m. & 10:00 p.m.
December 24, 2019
Christmas Eve, Year A

Our hearts which are hungry for something more than stuff latches onto that word. Our hearts which long for goodness, justice, and righteousness know that there is something more grand than receiving another new thing and grasp at the word "you." The gift beyond all gifts is ours; it has been given for each of us. The gift of God's anointed one is what we seek. He is the one who will save us from ourselves and our sins, and transform our brokenness, anger and hurt into love and joy. We are awed that God could be so generous to us. We are awed that such a gift can come in the form of a child.

In that moment of awe let your heart, broken and emptied so many times by the world, be healed and filled by the manger and the babe. He is the one who will heal the brokenness and fill all of the empty places with awe and wonderment. This is what we seek, this is the child born for us, this is the fulfillment of a promise made down through the ages, that our heart will be filled to overflowing with the most precious gift of all Emmanuel, God with us, this day and every day of our lives.