

Christmas Day Sermon

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my salvation. Amen.

Merry Christmas!

It is great to be celebrating Christmas, the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, at the beginning of the Christmas season with you.

I hope you will be blessed with God's favor, as well as receive what you were hoping to receive as a gift, as well as give what it is that might gladden someone's heart on this special Holy occasion, as may apply. The Prayer Book and General Convention of the Episcopal Church have decreed Christmas Day as a principal feast day of the Church year, coming alongside Easter Day, with Easter being the day that gives significance and the fullest meaning to Christmas.

The Gospel lesson today is from John's Gospel. At St. Timothy's in Fairfield, Connecticut, both as a lay person who had graduated from seminary, and I believe as a deacon, I used to preach on this reading, in most years the Gospel for the Sunday

after Christmas; this year we have the Holy Name of Jesus Gospel reading next week instead. On one of those earlier occasions, a parishioner came up to me after the service and said that she had gone many years before she found out that in this passage "the Word" was Jesus, and she wanted me to promise that I would make that clear for others. So, today, I am again fulfilling that promise.

Matthew's Gospel includes wise men about two years after Jesus' birth, and Matthew's recounting of events of Jesus birth is simply "Jesus was born", with the theme God with us (Emmanuel). Mark's Gospel cuts to the chase and begins with Jesus' adult life moving at a fast pace towards the Resurrection of Jesus at Easter, starting with the trinitarian manifestation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, marking (no pun intended) the beginning of Jesus ministry as an adult. John's Gospel begins before time, as we understand it, with the Word becoming flesh (Jesus) emphasizing that Jesus is God among us, with not a wise man nor a shepherd to be seen.

For the most biblical details of Christmas Day, turn to Luke's Gospel, Jesus situated in a specific time and space. Luke, a doctor, includes a lot of specific names and specific details that can be helpful to put

the Gospel circumstances in context. Perhaps to understand it better, it is helpful to think as though you are on the ground, looking at the events through the eyes of Luke. How the Gospel explains things depends on what Luke is recording.

All four of these accounts complement one another, all look towards the meaning of Jesus' resurrection, and focus on eternal life for us through Christ. The purpose of this part of the prologue in John's Gospel can be found in the 20th chapter of the Gospel, a summation that both the prologue and John chapter 3 lead up to, the point that John was trying to make as to why the Gospel was written. As you may remember, John chapter 3 includes: for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

My paraphrase of a verse in John 20: these things were written (including the prologue) that you may believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and by believing you may have eternal life. Believing in the sense that John intends "believe" includes acting on that belief because you believe it.

Eusebius in the 4th century notes that John was aware of the other Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and

Luke), and John added some important things that they had left out.

John also mirrors the first chapter of Genesis in this prologue, and the New Testament is a kind of commentary on the Old Testament scriptures. The Old Testament had been the only Bible version in the first few decades of the Church, from the perspective of Jesus and the apostles. So, in light of who Jesus was, what he said, such as on the Road to Emmaus after his Resurrection, and what happened, the interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures for the Church and the New Testament is through the lens of Jesus and the inspired and Holy Spirit gifted leadership of his successors.

Some of the wording in the first chapter of John may sound like some of the wording in the Nicene Creed about Jesus, and that overlay of the Creed on top of the Gospel of John is intentional by the fourth century architects of the Nicene Creed.

An important point is that Christmas gets its meaning from the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return of Jesus Christ. Today, we are at the birth of Jesus; of the Kingdom of Heaven now, and the fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven later on; like what

C. H. Dodd mentioned as: Christians are living both in the "now" and also in the "not yet" of eternal life.

As recorded in the Book of Acts, with the coming of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, the Church has been empowered to go forth in the Name of the Holy Trinity to do that which we are called to do, which we are inspired to do, as agents of God's peace and good will to all people, in ministry, mission, sacraments, and way of life. In what we do and say.

Perhaps you have had moments, when you sense the presence of God in what you doing, that is a glimmer of eternal life now and life in eternity with God, later on. For me, they can be moments of great awe, that cause me to reflect that what I am experiencing is the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit meeting me where I am, always one step ahead of me, no matter what path I am on.

Continually, I am trying to live into God's love, joy, and peace in whatever I do and say. How am I doing? For a high energy person like myself, it's a constant work in progress, and yet I become more attuned to what happens if I trust God in the moment. And I sometimes am finding that the delay that I encounter en route to shopping or a church

appointment can be a divine intervention or that the unexpected person I meet at a busy moment when I have a list of things to do, is a messenger of God, saying peace and good will to all people. A smile. A greeting. a helping hand. Helps me focus on what God is doing. And vice versa for other people, including my lending a helping hand to neighbors who are trying keep track of an aged dog wandering wherever, even across our lawn. So, I take a photo on my cell phone and text it too them. They appreciate that. The dog and I and our neighbors are on good terms. Or my praying with the man who delivers oil to our house.

And then there are those other moments such as a Vestry meeting when someone says something that I was thinking, and the Gospel moves onward, and in fact, the world is saved from my interjection of a comment. There is joy in that, for everyone.

And now, my voluntary assignment:
This week, enjoy Christmas!

And be on the look out for what Jesus the Word of God may be inspiring you to do, perhaps manifesting God's joy and God's peace for someone else in one particular way, as divine intervention.

I conclude with a Prayer:

Heavenly Father, loving God, thank you for Jesus' presence among us on this Christmas Day; we ask your Holy Spirit to reveal to us one particular way the we might spread your joy and peace to someone, that all would be done in your way, in your time, and to your glory. In Jesus' Name, we pray. Amen.