

December 31, 2017

(John 1: 1 - 18)

**In the Name of the living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

While it is after December 25, according to Roman Julian calendar, it is still Christmas here....inside our church and inside our hearts.

We know that in subtle ways. We are still singing the old familiar Christmas carols that most of the world stopped hearing days ago. The nave is still decorated with the greens of the season. The altar still celebrates this special, glorious time with our festival white vestments. And our liturgy continues with all of those unique, little remembrances of collect, and prayer, and response....all of it, all prolonging the joyous celebration of the Christ Mass with the company of Angels, and Archangels, and all the company of heaven!

But, I ask you rhetorically, “In today’s gospel reading from St. John the Evangelist, what makes the same glorious reference to the Christmas story?”

In preparation for preaching the gospel today, I ran into a peculiarity with this passage from St. John. The reason this seems odd to me...at first glance...is, as I stated earlier, we go to great lengths to contradict the modern-day image that Christmas is a “25<sup>th</sup> and out” event. How could you think any differently in today’s world? It is all around us. The used boxes and bows and wrapping are all in the trash. The trees either go back into storage or out to the curb starting the next day. We get blitzed on television or in the newspaper about “After Christmas Sales”...particularly this year after reports of flat retail sales following Thanksgiving. The world cannot wait to move its materialistic frenzy onto the next marketing “big thing”. What is that? Valentine’s Day? Meribeth told me that Valentine’s Day items are on the store shelves somewhere...and it is not yet even New Year’s Day.

Yet, the great effort of the church is to get us to slow down...to keep us **HERE**...in the eternal and sacramental celebration of the Christ Mass...of God coming to be with us. So, we center on the very first words, the opening lines, of the Gospel according to John. And we wonder what is the connection with this season.

John has no nativity story, no animals in the barn, no shepherds and angels. Instead, it presents us with this hymn to Christ. It is a love song, full of increasing light, celebrating the relationship between God and God’s only child, and then extending that intimate relationship to embrace all humankind. These are powerful words that speak to us about the one who comes to us in power to make all things new for us – the exiles, the inhabitants of darkness.

Who is this Jesus, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us?

If we see only the baby lying in the manger, we only see part of the picture. Just as we did not celebrate Advent by pretending that Christ has not come, so we do not celebrate Christmas by pretending we do not know what is going to happen to this child.

Christmas does not stand alone. It cannot be celebrated properly in isolation from the whole story of Jesus as the Christ. To separate the story of his birth from the harsh reality of his crucifixion is to engage in denial. The whole story reminds us that we must also see Jesus as the one who is not received.

The very people who hoped finally got the one whom they hoped for....and they did not recognize him and rejected him. When God came to us, it was as one who is weak and vulnerable, not just as the holy infant but also as the adult hanging on the cross. Yet Jesus, the weak, flesh-and-bone one, has real power. Not the power of the world. Not the power to make things right or prosperous. That is why it continues to be rejected by the world. His power is to let us be who we are created to be.....the very children of God.

The coming of Jesus presents us with a choice. We can be transformed to be the people of God, walking in the vulnerable ways of God. Or, we can reject him and continue business as usual...sitting in the darkness, shielding our eyes, turning away from the life-giving light.

We gather around the story today...one of transforming hope for a new life. We are invited to cooperate with the divine initiative, to let the light enable us to see the path more clearly, to make a new beginning as the people of God.

When that happens, heaven and earth **do** sing. There **is** joy to the world.

The church gives us not one day, but twelve, to celebrate the birth of Christ, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Join me in taking that time. Do not be overwhelmed or tired by the cultural rush to move on.

We will take the time God blesses us with. Time to look for ways to be transformed by God for God. Time to walk those vulnerable pathways of God, yet in the company and love and support of each other. To persevere in hope and joy...not to be abandoned like Christmas trees discarded on Christmas afternoon. For the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, so that we might see his glory and come into the loving presence of God, full of grace and truth revealed to us as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.