

St. James' E-pistle

December 27, 2013

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

Merry Christmas once again! I hope you had a happy and safe celebration of the Nativity.

It was definitely one of the stranger Christmas Eve's we've had in awhile. It started with illnesses and family emergencies, and ended with an unexpected snow squall that nearly scuttled the 10:00 PM service altogether.

Those who were with me before the 10:00 PM candlelight service know that I was sort of freaking out with the snow, the bad roads and the calls from scheduled service leaders (acolytes, ushers, lay reader, choir members...) that they couldn't get out. It was definitely better to stay home than to get in a wreck, and many of those who did attend said the roads were dangerous.

So, with minutes to go before we were to start, we were scurrying about asking anyone who braved the weather to take a role. And somehow, with a small crowd and a bit of an edge in the atmosphere, we began to welcome the Christ Child into the world.

Mind you, we had managed the 6:00 PM service just fine - some reduced ranks due to illness, but it went off without (much of) a hitch. The instrumentalists, from the string trio to the St. James' Orchestra were beautiful.

But it was during the service of light at the beginning of the late service that my rattled nerves began to settle down. I began to let go of worries about who was or was not there, about how we were going to clean up, about whether people were going to be able to get home safely (I had obsessively checked the weather reports between services and knew the snow was supposed to stop before 10:00, so anyone who got there should be able to get back without too much trouble).

And as I let go of the worries, I finally was able to let some of the Peace of Christ enter in.

As I said in the sermon, we tend to surround ourselves with a lot of noise in preparation for the birth of Christ - and most of that noise isn't very helpful. But when we take some time to be silent, to sit with that holy child, to listen to what God speaks in our hearts, then the noise fades away.

Let us enjoy the presence of Christ in our hearts this holy season. There are still nine more days of Christmas, so maybe you can devote one of them to a little bit of quiet time. Not that you'll want to stay quiet, mind you.

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As I said Christmas Eve, and as the shepherds at the manger demonstrated, after you've sat with Christ, you're going to want to get up and tell the world.

Merry Christmas, God Bless You this Christmas Season, and Happy New Year!

In Christ,

Chuck+

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The News of the Church

Epiphany Pageant Notes: Our Epiphany Pageant is on Saturday, January 4 at 6:30 PM. Currently, there is not planned any sort of reception following it. If you would like there to be one, however, and would like to help organize it, please contact me as soon as possible.

Also, we need **two stage hands** for the pageant. Must be able to move several pieces of furniture - one of the requiring two people. Please see Fr. Chuck

Please see the attached flier for details.

Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Janet Arms, Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Kurt Burkhardt, Michael Day, Jane Gagliardoto, Kasey Gaulin, Jack Gordy, Andy Hall, Harold Hall, Jolanda Heijenbrok, Brooke Helton, Rev. Don Hoger, Barbara Knakal, Rosemary Leuken, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Clifford Plass, Gerald Plass, Deborah Porach, Don Renten, John Robinson, Marty Schroeder, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Debbie Stone, Gloria Veach, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way and Cliff Wells.

Schedules

A Note about Schedules: The names you see below are those listed on their respective schedules. There are often times when, due to sickness or travel, substitutes are asked to fill in or trade positions. This will probably NOT be reflected in the lists below—so, if there is an inconsistency between what you see here and what you see on Sunday, that is alright.

Birthdays:	Rebecca Mungo
Acolytes:	December 29: Team II
Altar Guild:	December 29: TBD
8 a.m. Readers:	December 29: Angela Henry and Sue DeLorenzo
Ushers:	December 29: Bobbie and Cliff Wells 1/5/2013: 0
Pledge Clerks:	December 29: Paul Littlefield
Coffee Hour Hosts:	December 29: The Choir

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This Week's Lectionary

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7

John 1:1-18

Sermon Preached on
Fourth Sunday of Advent
(December 22)

"Signs: Sooner or Later"

Ever write or say something and have it be completely misunderstood? I remember back in college going to a talk given by the playwright Edward Albee who was discussing his play, "Zoo Story." It has two characters named Peter and Jerry, and it's all about dehumanization in a commercial world.

He said at after a previous reading he had given, a nun came up to him and said she completely got the play. She loved how Jerry represented Jesus, and how it was all about his relationship with the apostle Peter but in modern terms. Mr. Albee told us that he simply nodded his head, smiled and said, "Thank you, sister."

Then he said something like, "I didn't have that in mind at all when I wrote it. But she saw it in there, and writing always involves more layers than even the writer is aware of - maybe I was thinking about Jesus without realizing. So, I'm taking credit for it."

I won't swear that this is what happened between our reading in Isaiah and in Matthew, but it's clear that the sign Isaiah intended to give originally and the sign that Matthew took from it are two different things.

Let's look at Isaiah for a moment. Remember, he was a prophet operating in the 8th Century before Christ. In his prophecy we see quoted, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. he was thinking much more short term - like now. And in fact much of what he said the child would be a sign of - the destruction of Israel's enemies followed by the eventual destruction of Israel and Judah themselves - did indeed come to pass in his time. (you just have to read a little further to get that).

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BUT in the New Testament, Isaiah is the most quoted prophet - the most quoted book from the Old Testament. Couple that with Matthew who quotes from the Old Testament more than any other evangelist, and you get this sign - Immanuel.

Matthew sees the sign as fulfillment - again, everything must be in fulfillment of the prophets. Jesus must be seen not as destroying the law and prophets but as fulfilling them. So the sign that Isaiah gave us about a young woman giving birth to a child who would be named Immanuel makes perfect sense.

Is it fair that Matthew can take some sign from so long ago and claim it for the present? Well, if that nun can see something completely different from what Albee intended - and Albee is okay with it - then why not.

Had that name not been specifically "God With Us," Matthew might not have seen the connection. But God with us is exactly what Jesus was - and therefore the prophecy is fully completed with the Christ child.

It is also confirmed with another, newer sign. When Joseph is ready to break things off with Mary because she is with child, the angel of the Lord appears in a dream and tells him this child is of the Holy Spirit. This is a holy child - one who brings a truer, deeper salvation than Isaiah could have anticipated.

So, yes, Isaiah's prophecy holds true and fair for Matthew - He may not have exactly had Jesus in mind when he gave that sign, but that is not important. The child he became something completely different - and more - than he could ever know. Amen.

Sermon Preached on Christmas Eve

"A Not So Silent Night"

Tonight is a special night, so I thought I'd play a Christmas Tuba solo for you.

[Try to play. The sound is muffled. I try to play again. Again, it is muffled to the point of making almost no sound. I look inside the bell of the tuba.]

Aha! Look what I found! [Pull out a stuffed toy lamb.]

Maybe this is one of the lambs from the shepherds who left their fields to go in search of the Christ child.

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[Talking to lamb] What are you doing in there, lamb? Oh look, there's a note attached. It says, "SILENCE." Huh, the lamb wants silence. Gee the silence of the lamb - but why silence? [to lamb] Why do you want silence, lamb?

[I hold the lamb speaks to my ear]

Oh? So you have nothing against, tuba, right? Ah, you love tuba? Great! But now is the time for silence. Tell me more. [listen a minute]

Okay everyone, here's what the lamb said - and believe it or not, it makes sense.

Christmas is a time when there is a lot of noise. Even tonight, there are people packing the malls for last minute deals, bell ringers raising money, TV specials on every channel. There are Christmas songs on the radio 24 hours a day. And even in church, we make a lot of noise in getting ready for Christ to come

We have this wonderful orchestra, we have the organ, we have hymns, we have lots of hustle and bustle decorating the church.

And in all that commotion we sometimes forget what we are doing here in the first place. So our lamb here thinks we need a little silent time to think about who Jesus is and why his being born is important to us.

So let's think for a moment. Who is Jesus? Well, we Christians believe he is the Son of God. But that doesn't really tell us very much. Why would God have a son in the first place?

Think about this: A long time ago, God created the earth and us. We can't really say exactly why, but we think it's because God has so much love to share that he wanted children to share it with.

But a sad thing happened over time. We kind of got scared of God. We began to think that God was always angry, hard to please, ready to zap us if we put one toe out of line. In other words, we began to think of God almost as a monster who you had to tiptoe around.

We also believe this made God sad. If you created something to love, and they were afraid of you or even hated you, you'd be sad, too. Well, God knew that trying to force us to love him wouldn't work, so what could he do?

He became one of us. That is, he sent his son to become completely and fully one of us. That meant becoming a baby - and I don't care what "Away in the Manger" says, I bet he cried plenty when he was a baby.

But becoming one of us doesn't really do much all by itself. Jesus had to grow up and teach us what it means to be in love with God. His whole life was spent looking at God, listening, talking

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to, following God - and teaching us to do the same. And he taught us to look at God as a father. Which is pretty good.

But it wasn't enough for God. If you're a teacher, your students are important to you, but it's not the same as being your beloved children - and God wanted us to know that we are his beloved children. That's why Jesus did what most parents would do if they had to - he died for us. Now that's love.

But even that wasn't enough for God either. Because one of the things we fear the most in life is dying. And God wanted us to know that when we die, we don't really die. Jesus rose from the dead to show us that death has no power - that we will live forever with God.

That's a lot for one person to do. Maybe that's why we can imagine that the shepherds, when they found Jesus in the manger, knelt down and worshipped him in silence.

I think that's what our lamb here is saying. When we take time to be quiet - to focus on Jesus, on everything he did and said, on who he is, then we can appreciate just how important he is to us.

[hold lamb to ear]

What's that? Oh! Lamb also says that those shepherds did not stay silent for long. After they had worshiped Christ at the manger, they went away glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Lamb says that you and I can do the same thing. After we've sat in silence and really thought about who Jesus is, really sat with Jesus, we'll want to go out and tell the world, too. And that's what we can all do when we leave tonight - share the good news that Jesus Christ is born. Because there is a time to be silent, and there's a time to make noise.

It's a noisy world out there, but once you've been silent with Christ for awhile, you'll know when it's time to talk about the Good News. And in a world of noise, that'll sound like music.

What's that? Right! Lamb says that sometimes it's a little scary to share good news, but that there are always people who are willing to help. That's why my friend Rich here is going to help me make some beautiful music that I hope will inspire you to go out and make some noise of your own.

If you know it, sing along as we play "Go Tell It on the Mountain." [play]. Just remember, when we share God's love like that, it's a beautiful gift to God. Amen.

The Magi Mystery Tour



An Epiphany Pageant

Saturday, January 4, at 6:30 pm

All Welcome - NO Entry Fee

*St. James' Episcopal Church
4525 Albany Post Road
Hyde Park, NY*