

Christmas Eve

Dec 24, 2023

Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Luke 2:1-14

Rev Julie Platson, St Peter's by the Sea Episcopal Church

A Glorious Celebration!

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" Luke 2:14

The celebration begins! Christmas is finally here! All of those weeks of waiting and preparations for the "perfect holiday"....have finally come down to the true test...Will the cookies be tasty? Will the tree look beautiful? Will the nativity scene be complete with every person and animal in their designated spot? Will the flowers in the church be magnificent? Will the music be inspiring and glorious? Will the gifts given be the perfect ones?

Is this really how we measure the goodness and successes of our Christmas Holidays? Is this really what Christmas is all about?

Hopefully, not....but it is easy to get caught up in all of the excitement of the Christmas holiday preparations and forget what and for whom this Christmas Celebration is for...*The yearly festival of the birth of God's only Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ...* And the seasonal remembrance to celebrate the glory of God, the love of God poured out for us, not only on that first Christmas...but with the promise that this great light and love of God made known to us in Jesus, will come again...and that God is with us...Emmanuel...God will always be with us...

We celebrate on this holy night...that the Light of Christ has come...and will come again...and again...into those times of darkness in our lives...to give us hope, to give us peace, to give us joy, once again, and to surround us with the glorious love of God...that has the power to transform our lives and the lives of all those we meet, near and far...

Our Christmas Celebration begins because of the Good News that God is with us....in all of God's glorious light and love that shines down upon us...waiting for us...to look up, to look within, and to look all around us for these signs of God's presence among us...and to welcome that light and love into our hearts...

In the reading from Luke this evening...the Shepherds experienced God's glorious light, so many years ago while keeping watch over their flock by night.... ..

"An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people..."

The Glory of the Lord shone all around them... they weren't sure what to make of it at first...all this glorious light all around them...the scriptures indicate they were terrified, very afraid...they knew something was happening...something they had never before experienced...they had never seen such a light before...

Into that dark night and in the midst of their fear and terror... the angel of the Lord boldly announced the good news of great joy for all the people:

...to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

Into that dark night and in the midst of their fear and terror, the good news of the long promised one, the holy child had come into the world...proclaiming:

The Light of Hope has come.

The Light of Peace has come.

The Light of Joy has come.

The Light of Love has come.

The Light of Christ has come!

There was nothing that the shepherds could have done to stop this light from coming...a child was born...*the Messiah, the Lord...* In the midst of all their fear and terror....the Glory of the Lord shone all around them... **The Light of Christ had come!**

We are living in some very troubling times now...some very uncertain and terrifying times for many, all over the world...there are some among us tonight, whose holiday season may be filled with sorrow, and missing loved ones no longer with us...

But, just as God's glorious light and love was revealed to the shepherds and in the songs of the angels on that first Christmas so long ago...so it is again with us, this night... nothing...no sorrows, no darkness can stop the glorious light of God's hope, peace, joy and love from coming into our lives now...

One of my favorite Advent/Christmas rituals over the years has been to watch the Christmas classic *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss.

The goal of the Grinch is to steal Christmas from the whole town, and he cheers himself with the thought of their crying and wailing on Christmas morning. So he sneaks into town and steals everything associated with Christmas. Then he hauls the whole lot up to the top of a high mountain to dump it.

Just before the deed, he stops to listen for the sounds of misery. But, to his bewilderment, the Grinch hears the sounds of joy as Christmas carols rise into the air, proclaiming the arrival of Christmas.

*"He hadn't stopped Christmas from coming, it came.
Somehow or other, it came just the same." (Ann Robertson)*

All of us gathered this evening are witness to that: Christmas cannot be stopped from coming...For it is already here...

Yet for too many people in this world, this good news and signs of God's glorious light and love are not evident to them. That's where you and I come in. It's up to all of us to share these gifts given at Christmas...throughout the whole year...with people near and far...until everyone knows and believes that God is with us all...Emmanuel... **God will always be with us all...**

This is the reason we celebrate tonight!

The Light of Hope has come.

The Light of Peace has come.

The Light of Joy has come.

The Light of Love has come.

The Light of Christ has come...and will come again...

So, this year...let's put aside the idea of a holiday made perfect by the cookies being delicious; the tree looking sparkling and beautiful; the nativity scene be complete with every person and animal in their designated spot, the flowers in the church being magnificent; the music being inspiring and glorious, and the perfect gifts being chosen for our loved ones...

Let the true celebration begin now.... Let us envision ourselves, and people all over the world, standing side by side together, and standing with the shepherds, surrounded by God's Glorious light and love...and may we hear the songs of the angels and join with the choirs of angels praising God... *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God 'LOVES'!"*

Closing Prayer/Hymn 96 – all sing

Angels we have heard on high, singing sweetly through the night,
and the mountains in reply echoing their brave delight.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why these songs of happy cheer?
What great brightness did you see? What glad tidings did you hear?

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee Christ, the Lord, the newborn King.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

See him in a manger laid whom the angels praise above;
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid, while we raise our hearts in love.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Closing prayer before the Blessing/How the Light Comes – Jan Richardson

I cannot tell you how the light comes.

What I know is that it is more ancient than imagining.

That it travels across an astounding expanse to reach us.

That it loves searching out what is hidden, what is lost, what is forgotten or in peril or in pain.

That it has a fondness for the body, for finding its way toward flesh, for tracing the edges of form, for shining forth through the eye, the hand, the heart.

I cannot tell you how the light comes, but that it does. That it will.

That it works its way into the deepest dark that enfolds you, though it may seem long ages in coming or arrive in a shape you did not foresee.

And so may we this *night* turn ourselves toward it.

May we lift our faces to let it find us.

May we bend our bodies to follow the arc it makes.

May we open and open more and open still
to the blessed light that comes.