

The Lord Is Come

TEXT:
Christmas Eve

December 24, 2007

It is a wonderful night to gather together to hear the words of the story once again. We are delighted that you are present this evening, that you are not among those who pursue, what *New York Times* writer Frank Rich would call, a churchless spirituality.

You are here this night because the words of the story and the music of the season still move you; it still feeds your soul. The child in the manger among the animals continues to offer a sense of hope for our world and an inspiration for our lives.

By now, we have all heard the story: a young Jewish woman and her husband, traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem, some 90 miles south. Forced on the road by edict of the Roman emperor had ordered a census to determine how many people lived under his reign – no self-esteem problems there!

The young woman is in the final days of her pregnancy. The journey is long and travel is hard. When they arrive in Bethlehem, the inn is already full, so they spend the night in the stable. During the night, the woman gives birth to her son, and she and her husband wrap him tightly to keep him safe and warm and use the manger for his first cradle. Immediately, this baby was held in highest esteem by the wise and the lowly alike.

And even in this day, the story touches a deep vein that runs

within each of us, that longs for a better, more just and peaceful world, one that matches the words of the angels spoken to the shepherds in the field:

“Peace on earth,
and good will to all with
whom God is pleased.”

Something changed that night; the course of human events was profoundly altered. In the generations since, ordinary people like you and me, have found courage and wisdom to live life in his light, offering love, generosity and hope to others.

The poet, Maya Angelou, in her *Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem*,ⁱ takes note of the power of this season, and writes:

It is the glad season. . . .
Hope is born again in the
faces of children
It rides on the shoulders of
our aged. . . .
Hope spreads around the
earth. Brightening all things. .
. . .
In our joy, we think we hear a
whisper.
At first it is too soft. Then
only half heard.
We listen carefully as it
gathers strength.
We hear a sweetness.
The word is Peace.

It is loud now. . . .
We tremble at the sound. . . .
It is what we have hungered
for. . . .

At this Holy Instant, we
celebrate the Birth of Jesus
Christ. . . .

We, Angels and Mortals,
Believers and Nonbelievers,
Look heavenward and speak
the word aloud. . . .
Peace.

Marcus Borg is one of the best known biblical scholars living today. In one of his books he tells a story from his childhood. He was five years old and was helping his mother make Christmas cookies. She was doing most of the work, mixing and rolling out the dough. His job was to wield the cookie cutter. As he cut out the cookies, he sang, "Joy to the world, the Lord has come."

"No," his mother said. "That's not right. The words are `the Lord is come,' not `the Lord has come.'"

But little Marcus was puzzled. He asked, "Isn't Christmas about something that happened a long time ago? Why is it "is come" and not "has come"? Why the present tense?" Then his mother put down the cookie dough and explained that Christmas was both a story about the past and a story about the present, otherwise the Christmas story remains only a history lesson rather than a living story about what is happening now.ⁱⁱ

As we come to this place and hear this story again, remember that the story has not passed us by; it is a story that continues to live within us, in our hopes and

dreams, in our prayers of peace,
in our sharing with neighbors,
and in the love we share with our
family.

Joy to the World, the Lord is
come.

ⁱ Maya Angelou, *Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem* (Random House 2005). Excerpted from a sermon by John Buchanan, Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, December 24, 2005.

ⁱⁱ Ed Bacon, taken from his Christmas Eve sermon, 2005, at All Saints Episcopal Church, Pasadena, CA. <http://www.allsaints-pas.org>

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