

First Sunday after Christmas
Year C

Isaiah 61:10 - 62:3

Psalm 147

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

John 1:1-18

The readings today give a different view of the nativity of Jesus than we are used to reading. There is no long discourse about the ancestry of Jesus, or how a young girl might be pregnant. We don't see a young couple who needed to travel for days at the command of a distant government.

The opening verses of the Gospel according to John describe what many call a cosmic view of Jesus' birth. There are none of the trappings of Christmas we are so accustomed to reading about. There is no manger, no shepherds, no angels, no wise men. There isn't even Mary and Joseph! How can this be considered a story of the nativity? Hasn't John read Luke's account?

If we compare the beginning of this gospel with the beginning of Genesis, we begin to see where John is coming from. We see a much grander story. In the beginning God - created and spoke. In Genesis, we read of the days of creation, how God created everything there is by speaking. In John, we see the method of that speaking, the Word became flesh. Right here, we see the nativity of Jesus, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Not a Hallmark card scene, but the nativity just the same.

Paul doesn't have much more to offer in his writing. He just states the fact - "but when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law..." In just a few words, Paul has conveyed the message of the birth of Jesus within the Jewish tradition. Again, there are none of the trappings that make our modern celebration.

Carols written based on these two accounts of the nativity would be rather boring, in my opinion. I don't think George Frederick Handel could do much with these words. But, in both of these passages, we see the essence of the nativity - Jesus came into the world.

What does this say about our traditional Christmas celebration? Should we still have a tree with gifts under it? Should we have a crèche with shepherds and angels and the wise men coming from afar? Do we lay Jesus in a bed of straw with Mary and Joseph hovering over Him? Yes, because all of these are symbols of how Jesus came into the world to interact with mankind. The shepherds represent the lowest portion of society, while the wise men represent both the upper class of society, but also the diversity of people called to witness this birth. God's angels were there to proclaim to mankind that this great event has taken place. So yes, we need to remember all of these characters of the story. But, we also need to realize that Jesus is more than a baby laying on straw, even in His birth.

Paul reminds us of the purpose of Jesus' birth - so that we may become children of God. Jesus came that we might enjoy the adoption into God's family. Even as we enjoy having family with

us during these holidays, so also, God wants us to know that we are welcome in God's family too. And, not only us, but all mankind. We need to expand our vision of the Christmas dinner table to include everyone - the poor, the lame, the ill, our neighbors, and those who mean to do us harm. Yes, even those who hate us. As John says, "all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." Later, John reminds us that "God so loved the *WORLD*, that he gave his only Son." That includes everyone, so we need to expand our vision to include everyone at our table. That is the true message of Christmas for us today.