

2009 Christmas Eve – Family Service (6:30pm)

Note – In addition to participating in our Candlelighting Ceremony, I was responsible for Opening Words, the Offering, and the Benediction at this early service. As it turns out, I was also responsible for protecting kids from the Advent candles (and vice versa) while they were participating in our pageant! It was a great joy to be on the platform with all the kids during this part of the service!

Opening Words

Welcome, welcome, and Merry Christmas!

The tree shines with decorations, lovingly arranged,
And our faces shine with delight, just to be together!

Gifts carefully chosen, and beautifully wrapped, await Christmas morning,
And the presence of those we love most is the dearest gift of all!

The cookies are baked and will be set out for Santa,
And our little ones, as they surrender to the pure joy of it all,
Remind us of our need for wonder, and of the power of hope!

May *your* Christmas be full of all these things:

- * love, reflected from shining face to shining face,
- * wonder, overflowing from joyful heart to joyful heart,
- * and hope – divine and powerful hope – holding us in this season, and in all the days ahead!

Welcome, welcome, and Merry Christmas!

Please join together in singing #7 from our Red Carol Book: "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

Offering

From the Gospel of Matthew: ⁹*When the [wise men] had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. ¹¹And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh."*

My friends – did you know that *you* are the wise ones who have arrived tonight with the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh? We know that nothing smells so rich and sweet as food, when our bellies are growling with hunger. We know that nothing feels so right as to care for our children and families by offering them meals prepared with love. We know that our deepest gratitude for all that we treasure is best acknowledged in our willingness to share with others. As you will notice in your Order of Service, tonight's entire collection is for the benefit of our food pantry. Please be generous with your gold, your frankincense, and your myrrh, remembering that your gifts will be used to feed 40 families, every week, for an entire year. You are the wise and generous ones. You are the founders of the feast. Eternal blessings on your generosity!

Benediction

May *your* Christmas be full of all these things:

- * love, reflected from shining face to shining face,
- * wonder, overflowing from joyful heart to joyful heart,
- * and hope – divine and powerful hope – holding us in this season, and in all the days ahead!

Travel safely, Merry Christmas, and blessed be!

2009 Christmas Eve – Adult Service (8:00 pm)

Note – In addition to participating in our Candlelighting Ceremony, I was responsible for two homilies during our second Christmas Eve service: The Wonder of the Season and The Mystery of the Season.

THE WONDER OF THE SEASON

*"Star of Wonder, Star of Light, Star of Royal Beauty, Bright
Westward Leading, Still Proceeding, Guide Us to Thy Perfect Light!"*

And so the story goes, in the Gospel of Luke, that shepherds, "keeping watch over their flocks by night," were visited by a heavenly host of angels who said to them, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people..."

...and it was *such good news*, and the shepherds were *so inspired*, that they left all that was safe, all that was familiar, and all that was most dear to them and to their families – their flocks of sheep – and, trusting this holy call, they ventured to a Bethlehem stable...

And so the story goes, in the Gospel of Matthew, that three wise men *follow a star*:

⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed...

We wonder...we wonder about this story of shepherds inspired and wise men overjoyed...we wonder about a virgin birth, and a beckoning star, and a manger-born savior...and we wonder how people could believe such a story...and yet...and yet, here we are, over two thousand years later, still wondering...

There are many ways to consider the word "wonder"...

To wonder is to imagine, to creatively explore, to freely consider...such as wondering about this remarkable story of humility and love that overcomes arrogance and power.

To wonder is also to appreciate, with awe and with reverence...such as wondering at a guiding star, or wondering at a glorious and unexpected message that seems to shift the ground beneath our very feet – testing everything we thought we knew, and yet, awe-inspired, we move deeper into our own lives... into our own becoming.

A wonder is an amazing thing to behold or to experience. We speak of the wonders of the season...such as generosity, love, hope; goodwill, peace, hope; gratitude, forgiveness, hope; music, candlelight, hope; good food, rich colors...and, did I mention, hope?

For hope is a wonder – no, hope is the wonder of the season...for it is hope, in the story of the Christ child, that bridges heaven and earth...it is hope that echoes the eternal call and response of life... it is hope where the human and the divine are most endeared one, to another. Hope is the most wonder-filled gift we can offer to each other, in this season, and throughout the year.

Hope is *the* wonder of the season.

Whether you feel the responsibilities of wise men and women, or of shepherds, my Christmas wishes for you are these:

- * May the wonders of this season gift you with an extended season of wondering!
- * May you notice the stars that beckon you away from the demands of fields and kingdoms, and may you be overjoyed at the possibilities in such invitations!
- * May you foster your capacity for creative imagining, and may unfettered inspiration be your ever-abiding companion!
- * May you be awe struck with the miracles of life – especially the miracle of your very own life, and may the wonders of even an ordinary day in our natural world never cease to amaze you!
- * And may you continue to generously offer one another, and our world, the profound and wonder-filled gifts of love, and hope.

Blessed be.

Amen.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SEASON

We are a changed people during this season of the year...although some of our changes may not be for the better:

Our "to do lists" have expanded, we are rushed, and we might become a bit short-tempered, especially with strangers.

Our self-expectations have increased, we want things to be "perfect," and we might become a bit impatient, especially with ourselves – and perhaps even with those we love.

We are a changed people during this season of the year, and some of our changes are definitely for the better:

As the poet says, this is a time "...when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices." During this season, we change by developing a heightened awareness of the needs of others, and a deepened commitment to sharing from our own abundance.

As the longest nights give way to longer days, we are reminded of so many changes that are simply beyond our control. We change, in turn, by recommitting ourselves to that which *is* within our control: tending well all that we are and can be responsible for.

We are a changed people during this season of the year:

And yet, the constant companion of our changing selves is the ever-present "Mystery within" us that longs for connection with the "Mystery beyond" us.¹

In this season of Wonder and Expectation, our internal Mystery pulses forth, the rhythm of our own hearts slowing to keep pace with the deep peace of Mid-Winter.

And the great Mystery of the Season is this:

Our illusions of control are surrendered to the knowledge of our human vulnerabilities.

The blessings of such vulnerabilities emerge as a certain tenderness of heart and spirit.

In such tenderness, we discover our capacities for internal respite and reflections.

Such respite and reflections strengthen us for the holy work of transformation.

And The Mystery of Life within us and the Mystery of Life beyond us call to one another...

With every heartbeat and breath they call to one another!

And now,

Rested and renewed by the Mystery of the Season,

We respond to such calls with vigor, with determination, and with deep joy!

May it be so.

Blessed be.

Amen.

¹ #441 SLT - "To Worship" by The Rev. Jacob Trapp