Christmas Eve All Saints’ Church

December 24, 2016 Year A

Isaiah 9:2-7 Titus 2:11-14

Psalm 96 Luke 2:1-20

We give thanks for all our angels who tell us, “Do not be afraid.” Amen.

Merry Christmas! Welcome to the birth of the Living Lord- the babe in the manger who awakens us to our own births, our own hopes and dreams and the fullness of life and liberty.

I find the Christian faith full of paradoxes… opposing truths that stand side by side, equally, and we are supposed to make sense of them, not as separate standing truths but as side by side:

Jesus is both a baby and a king.

Jesus is both human and divine.

Mary is both a virgin and a mother.

The Eucharist is both bread and Jesus.

God is both three and one.

We are both dust of dust, ashes to ashes and the temple of the Living Lord.

With these contradictions, where is the rational mind to go? How do we resolve these mysteries, these opposites that hold differing truths, these impossible realities?

Tonight, we are invited to take a journey as a way to enter into the mystery.

And our guides are two young people, uneducated and poor. She’s unwed, but pregnant. He’s doing his best, with little money in his pocket, as he follows Emperor Augustus’ edict to return to his ancestral home for a world-wide census, miles away from his real home of security and livelihood, with his very pregnant, not-wife-yet. They are traveling by foot on a donkey.

What map are they following? We know by reading the Scripture that it is a map designed by Angels; and Mary and Joseph know that as well, but really?…. Is this the way to go? Travelling with angels as our only reliance?

I love the fact that Mary’s first response to the Angel Gabriel’s pronouncement that she will be the Mother of the Living Lord is not YES, but “how’s that goin’ to work?”

Joseph’s first response to hearing that his not-wife-yet is pregnant is to quietly divorce her- a merciful and kind act on his part, which in of itself goes against the patriarchy rule of the day.

But the angels have ***even more*** in store for these two as they come to them, and all those involved, in visitations and dreams and messages that don’t fit into worldly expectations.

All must trust in their inner voice, their inner experience of God, their third-eye sight, their unstopped ears, their own compass of faith. This listening is what is meant by the Living Lord taking residence within you. It’s that divine knowledge that deep, deep within, there is a grounding that knows no boundaries, and it is speaking to you. It’s your very soul crying out, pulsating, reverberating, and echoing. It’s those times that you don’t question the reality of this voice, this dream, this direction, but rather, whether or not you have the guts to follow it.

Jesus, one of our other guides, the non-duality thinker that he is, always invites us to a journey of his own map-making. When faced with anger, pettiness, negativity, Jesus tells a story, he changes the subject, he asks a new question, he refuses to engage with ill will, he invites us to meet God, to be honest with ourselves, to throw caution and false piety to the wind, to be inclusive, to love and to trust. Jesus knows that for minds to change, hearts first must change. He never gives answers; he only points the way which will transform our hearts within us, which will rise like the morning star.

And he says over and over again: Do not be afraid. Fear Not!

I was at one of my friend’s home during a thunder storm. Her young son was in bed upstairs, and though he had just been comforted, he was crying that he was afraid. My friend, who was from the south, said in her best southern drawl, “Now honey, don’t you not worry, don’t be afraid, Jesus is with you.”

The child responded, “I know Jesus is with me. I want someone with skin on them!”

Now, isn’t that the truth.

We all know times when there is no room in the inn, when we are dislodged, with little bearings, and fragility becomes our middle name. The very ground beneath us is tenuous, at best, lightning and thunder crashing about us, and we feel alone and afraid.

Yet, it is in ***this*** place of necessity, by some God-made design, when we can truly listen to our inner voice, the Living Lord within us, with more clarity, more insight, and more assurance that we are not alone. There is a map, designed by angels; we just have to have the guts to follow it.

But we do have guides. Joseph and Mary are inviting us to travel with them to a child who will usurp even the King of all Kings, Emperor Augustus who thinks he has the whole world numbered in his hands. Think again Caesar. His imperial palace will be replaced by a cradle in a manger; his binding power will be traded for bands of cloth, his Pax Romana will be overturned with a peace that surpasses all understanding, and his power of conquest will be given over to the power of the Cross.

The Cross, proof that it isn’t simply that God forgives us, but rather that God’s very essence is forgiveness. We are not stuck in the duality of good and bad, but rather we are invited to journey into God’s essence of Unity, always to live in God’s mercy, love and acceptance, no matter what.

And then we are invited to practice Resurrection as a daily practice. New life is rising out of the ashes of the Cross; it’s always possible, even in the deep darkness of the solstice night. We just need to follow our angel-designed maps.

And our guides? There are many. Like Mary and Joseph, our young parishioners whose hearts are being transformed, are leading the way.

I think of one who is taking a trip this January during her college’s intersession to minister to children who have cancer; or of another who responded with understanding after a fellow student told him that it was time for him to leave America and go back to his home in Mexico, or of the young people who travel to Centro Victoria in Juarez to build classrooms, or our youth group who traveled to Boston and accepted the most difficult task in welcoming into shelter the unhoused who have no shelter.

In the midst of the cold and the fear and the stench and the death, these Mary and Joseph guides of ours are practicing resurrection, no matter the circumstances. And they do it with a smile on their face, with joy because they have seen a great light; they are following their angel designed maps, listening to the Living Lord within their very essence: for a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Mother, Prince of Peace.

May the zeal of Christmas’ joy reside in all your hearts. Amen.

(the Rev.) Jamie L. Hamilton