Merry Christmas everyone! How wonderful it is to be here in this beautiful home of God we call All Saints’ as we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Yes, it is good to be here, do you agree? If you do, turn to the person on either side of you and let them know you are happy to be here with them, in this place, on this Christmas Eve. Welcome home!

This past summer I attended what is affectionately called Preaching Camp. It’s a weeklong opportunity for current and recently graduated seminarians in the Episcopal Church to come together to learn, worship and experience preaching. This year marked the 30th anniversary of the organization, and in celebration of that mission, our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, was the preacher and celebrant at a festival Eucharist.

Now, I don’t know if you have ever heard Bishop Curry preach. It is quite a treat. He is dynamic, exciting and he can deliver a message like no one else I have ever experienced. It’s definitely an experience. There was not a seminarian there that wasn’t furiously writing notes from his sermon. So, I hope he won’t mind if I borrow a few things from him as I speak with you this evening.

This particular day, as he addressed the congregation present on the topic of preaching the Word, he made the most remarkable statement. He looked out at us and he exclaimed, *“Preaching only happens at Christmas”.*  **Preaching only happens at Christmas**! And to punctuate his declaration, he quoted from that beloved gospel song, *Go Tell It On the Mountain*.

**“Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!”**

Tonight we read the Nativity story according to St. Luke. It is so familiar to us. Christians have been listening to this story for centuries– Earlier this evening the children of this parish enacted it – angels dancing and singing, shepherds, Mary and Joseph, a baby lying in the feeding trough in a barn. Tonight the words of the prophet have materialized; God the Son is the Word made incarnate – in the flesh, taking on our humanity. And it is just as God promised to Moses in the covenant on Mt. Sinai, *“I will walk among you, and I will be your God, and you will be my people.”* (Lev 26:12) **Go tell it on the mountain!**

And the angels spread the word, bringing the news of this miracle to the shepherds. It is indeed a miracle that the shepherds, who were at the very bottom of the social structure of the time, often stereotyped as thieves, liars and degenerates, these people with no status, no expectation or hope of being touched by the Divine, are the first to hear the Good News. It is to their frightened ears that the heavenly host declares that they, even they, especially they, are among those whom God favors.

And those shepherds, surprised, humbled, and amazed by what they heard and saw, went to see the child and they went forth and spread the word. **Go tell it on the mountain!**

I sometimes wonder if we would recognize a baby Jesus born in humble circumstance in this day and age of celebrity and the cult and power of personality. Would my heart be open to seeing what was right in front of me? Would I be humbled, surprised, amazed by the unexpected nature of that kind of Jesus?

Spiritual writer Richard Rohr speaks of this birth which the angel and heavenly host herald as an *ever new coming* of God in our hearts and lives. Rohr puts forth the idea that in the Incarnation, we are welcoming a *bigger mind*, something new that springs forth eternally from the Divine, rooted in Wisdom, rather than the rational; not seeking information, but transformation. He talks of living the entirety of our lives as though we are in Advent, in expectation, and experiencing new birth. Here we might find the truth of the incarnation: Christ is always walking toward us, toward understanding, toward justice, toward wisdom, toward transformation; God’s face ever turned in our direction, ever desiring relationship with us, and ever seeking to be born in our hearts.

I was talking with my massage therapist this week. She has a 6-year-old son. In their home, just as here in the church school room here at All Saints’, they have several nativity sets that they leave out year round for the children to play with. She says she often finds her son taking a figurine of baby Jesus out of his pocket or finding it in bed with him.

In the center of town where they live there is a nativity scene on display. That day as they drove by it, her son asked, “What will happen to the baby Jesus after Christmas is over?” She replied that the figures would be put away until the next Christmas season came. He was emphatic with her, and quite upset. **“No, we can’t put Jesus away in a box! Jesus belongs right here with us!”**

Out of the mouths of babes indeed! That 6 year old should be preaching here tonight! No, we can’t just put Jesus in a box after Christmas is over. The Good News is too good to keep to our selves. Now, remember that greeting you gave to your neighbors? It was just practice for this moment. Turn to them again and proclaim the Christmas joy….the good news that Jesus Christ is born!

How did that feel? You are evangelists now. Just imagine, Episcopal evangelists! **Go tell it on the mountain!** I say we hit the road tomorrow; what do you think? Are you with me?

You may think I’m kidding, but just remember what you yourself may have asked for the strength to do when you last came to Christ’s table to receive the bread and drink of new life. It is on page 366 of the Book of Common Prayer, so it must be true. Say it with me,

*“...And now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do,*

*to love and serve you as faithful* ***witnesses*** *of Christ our Lord,*

As Bishop Curry loves to proclaim, “We are the Episcopal Branch of The Jesus Movement”, and my friends, we have a message that, as clergy will often say, will preach. It is the message of Christmas and we might do well to pay attention to the fact that there are many messages out there today that call themselves Christian that may have little resemblance to the one that Jesus preached and lived.

As faithful **witnesses**, we, like John the Baptist before him, are here to point the way to Jesus by showing Christ in this world. The Rev. Kelly Brown Douglas puts it this way, *“If there is even one person who cannot live into the sacredness that God meant for us to live, then we must keep moving toward the God that is always moving toward us.”*  We, all of us here, are witnesses to the love of God in Jesus Christ, a love bursting with compassion, liberating and directed toward all of the shepherds of this world who are alienated in body, mind and spirit.

When all the presents are opened and the twinkling lights are packed away for another year, maybe this year we can leave Jesus out of the box and put him in our pocket as a reminder that Christmas is not a day or a season, but the reason for our lives.

“Now the Work of Christmas Begins” composed by Howard Thurman, African-American theologian, educator, and civil rights leader.

When the song of the angels is stilled,

when the star in the sky is gone,

when the kings and princes are home,

when the shepherds are back with their flocks,

the work of Christmas begins:

to find the lost,

to heal the broken,

to feed the hungry,

to release the prisoner,

to rebuild the nations,

to bring peace among the people,

to make music in the heart.

As we come to the table together on this Christmas Eve let us come with hearts broken open, waiting to be filled with the fire of the Spirit, that we might be faithful witnesses of Christ. This is the point in Bishop Curry’s address when we all had our “aha” moment. Let our lives, each and every moment, shout out the news of the Incarnation, because no amount of lovely words constitutes preaching unless Jesus is at the center. **Preaching only happens at Christmas**.

Sing…..

**“Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!”**