

CHRISTMAS EVE – MIDNIGHT MASS

The Rev. Robert G. Eaton - All Saints' Episcopal Church, San Diego, CA

O Come, let us adore him.

As I looked back at my various Christmas sermons, I noted that several years I began the sermon by announcing those very words. No surprise to me. It is one of my favorite hymns, one reason being that even just the chorus is undeniably powerful for worship and adoration.

O come let us adore him. Powerful, uplifting, profound, prayerful adoration, for a moment and event proclaimed by God for a certain time, for the world's salvation.

As we consider ourselves in symphony this evening through the various time zones of all the faithful who will be gathering to adore the Christ child, as in my home town and my family there, we give thanks for the mighty proclamation of his Name. Jesus. Emmanuel. Y'shua. Isa.

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O lord, our rock and our redeemer." Amen.

What a powerful hymn phrase that is, from the hymn tune Adeste Fidelis, from which in translation comes the English phrase, O Come, All Ye Faithful. In some sense, it is a relatively modern hymn, considering the Good News proclaimed this night is the story of Jesus Christ from over 2000 years ago, and the text for Adeste Fidelis was most likely written ONLY 260 years ago. Just a babe in music. Timeless, though. Timely then. Worshipful now. I hope you don't mind if we sing the refrain again.

We'll sing "o come let us adore him", then "for you alone are worthy", then o come, again, but the final time with harmony. And let's make use of the natural acoustics in this wonderful nave and chancel by singing without any accompaniment, that is, accapella. And let's stand, as you are able, to make sure that our diaphragms are more strongly pushing the air out of our lungs as we sing. First in unison, and not too quickly.

"O Come let us adore him. O come let us adore him; o come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord."

Now "For you alone are worthy..."

"For You alone are Worthy, for you alone are worthy; for you alone are worthy, Christ the Lord"

And now with harmony.....

"O Come let us adore him. O come let us adore him; o come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord."

[Pause to linger in the singing and moment of worship]

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You may have just experienced a sense of the Holy Spirit in this small moment of worship.

[Pause]

At the least, it can be emotionally moving. And God has allowed us emotions. You may be seated.

The traditional author of the hymn, John Wade, certainly meant that phrase to be on the lips of us people here, now, to regard with loving admiration and devotion the Son of God having been born, then. And even more beyond the birth, to have this same admiration and devotion for the adult Jesus, and for his work of salvation from the cross. This is why Jesus was born, whether you are child or adult. It is this act of God's Grace, as Paul said, that is of course the reason we gather this evening.

May I just say, It's not "the Christmas Story" with Jesus dropped into it. Its Jesus' story and our Christmas remembrance is a mighty big part of it.

To celebrate, worship and adore, the Word of God made manifest to us in the incarnation. The fulfillment, and the hope, of God's desire for us, and our desire to be in eternal communion with Him. Even communicate. With God.

Each time we gather for Christmas, the Nativity of Jesus Christ, we are brought to mind of the simple, yet most powerful and magnificent and mysterious work of God for us because he loves us.

It seems always timely.

But more than the timeliness in our lives now, and 260 years ago for John Wade, or 30, or 10 years ago when perhaps someone here came to a moment of seeking and accepting God's grace and love for the salvation of their soul, there was in fact a moment in time that was chosen for the birth of Jesus, the perfect will of God made this happen ---- with all of the amazing detail that only God could provide.

Besides the awesomeness of God's logistical ability as one part of the whole story, I bring this to your attention this year, about God's timeliness, because there seems to be an unending of proliferation during this season of church leaders using the phrase, "If Jesus were to be born to day, he would be born in" (Fill in the geography) or "Consider Jesus as a refugee from" (fill in the ethnicity) and how you might receive him in" (Fill in your location).

I understand why these comments are made, and the great call to a worldwide hospitality that is currently still focused on Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Mexico, Sudan, Ethiopia, and even Europe as a whole. As St Paul proclaims without mincing words, our Faith in Christ is to be adorned by good deeds while we await the consummation of the world in Jesus' second coming.

Otherwise, though, some have caused confusion by these statements. It's strange to have to say this, but Jesus – according to the scripture – would not have been born in 2017, and doesn't

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have to be born again, nor was the location of his birth a place of refuge running from some persecution.

Part of our proclamation and action is indeed the care and nurture of those in need. Do not forget that. The media brings the atrocities to our attention, and Christians are the first and the most generous up in arms with food, money, aid, hospitality. So it should be, and ever more, until he comes again, so help us God.

But again, these are the actions that come from our existing Faith. We don't need to be further manipulated in such well-meaning but confusing Christmas messages, "If Jesus were to be born today....." If.

Jesus was born at a certain time. A most particular time. That may seem inconsequential to some, but it is one more part of the fulfillment of the prophecies, and quite essential for the birth of Jesus, then.

The question has been put, "Why approximately 2017 years ago?" And that has been answered many times in various ways, historically, philosophically, usually explaining in the context of a worldwide Roman empire. The fact that there are various answers only leads us back to this statement.

Here he is...O come let us adore him.

And "here he is" is our response not to the whimsy of God, as if God threw a Nativity Dart at a cosmic progressive dartboard. No, it was a willful moment as God the Father had made known, and then executed the plan.

And then, for that particular moment to happen, certain very physical, and very committal acts had to be accomplished. The pregnancy of Elizabeth, who had been barren, and was not even close to being a young woman. The divine pregnancy of Mary. The betrothal of Joseph. And the decree of Caesar Augustus. On that matter, why was Mary in Bethlehem giving birth to Jesus?

Because Joseph was of the lineage of David. And Mary, as her legal duty, went with Joseph so he was accounted for as David's descendent, and Mary was registered also as of the family of Joseph. And thus Jesus. And then he was born.

If the story were to be irreparably minimized, some would say that Joseph went to fulfill a civic decree. And thus Jesus was born in the little town of Bethlehem. But when we are informed that the prophet Micah, for instance, said 700 years prior to that moment that this king would be born there, suddenly there is no justification in minimizing the event.

It is unnecessarily hypothetical and distracting to say, if I were God and Jesus were born today, I would have him born in....." Otherwise, it wouldn't have worked to say, "In all fulfillment." Do you see?

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“Today” said the angels “is born to you a savior who is Christ the King.” Historical moment. Decreed.

O come let us adore him, is the response then. As the shepherds did.

The point can be seen in two ways.

First, God knows and knew what he was doing. Right down to the right people, the Jews, the right guy, Joseph, the right woman, Mary. You, too, can trust in God’s faithfulness, and in God’s timing. We certainly can seek His will, and we see that he will share that with us. Even in a parish praying for God's leading for a new Rector. This is so important for All Saints right now. God knows you are seeking. And in his plan he is being faithful to your seeking. At this time, in this place, no other time will do. Begin to listen is our attitude.

O come let us adore Him!! Is the action. God’s timing is for us, as well.

And second, in his love and mercy, YOUYou....You....are THAT important to God the father. Who you are, what he desires in you, your heart, your mind, your strength, your soul. He wants you in his arms. Or else at no time, ever, would he have made all this happen at a particular time, in a particular place, with a particular people. There never would have been the birth that would culminate in the crucifixion and the resurrection. All so you, you, might have such a relationship with God.

Never tire, therefore, of the decoration of the church, of the different time schedule, of the setting of a crèche, of saying the Mass again, and all that it takes to get it done. For it is to remind us that Jesus came uniquely, and by God’s timing. Just as now.

And blessedly, even to the end of the ages. Sing it in your hearts tonight, every day, and forever.

O come, let us adore him, born to us, Christ the King.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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