

Christmas Day
Sermon for December 25, 2021
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

Isaiah 62:6-12
Psalm 97
Titus 3:4-7
Luke 2:8-20

Merry Christmas.

I expect to get this feeling of profound sadness after Christmas.
I'll wake up and it'll be tomorrow, the morning after Christmas.
It'll be really cold outside. I'll probably feel tired.
The Christmas cards and presents will all be opened.
And I'll feel sad. Christmas will feel like it's over. I'll feel disappointed.

I want to cling to Christmas.
I enjoy remembering all those Christmases of the past, and this Christmas.
Christmases when all my Aunts, Uncles and Cousins would gather at our
grandparents for a joyful Christmas morning.

We had such a wonderful Christmas Eve here at TOTH.
More than _____ of us gathered in this sanctuary Friday evening to watch our
children and adults reflect on the Nativity story of the Grumpy Shepherd.

With all the music the children and adult choirs provided at the early and late
services - wow it was a masterful celebration.

And then it was over.

Of course, I know it isn't over.
In our tradition there are 12 days of Christmas and this is still the first day.
We have 11 more days to Epiphany,
which marks the end of the Christmas season.

That's when the wise men visit the Holy Family.

So today we discover that:

On the first day of Christmas my true love sent to me
A [partridge](#) in a [pear](#) tree.

On the second day of Christmas my true love sent to me
Two [turtle doves](#),
And a partridge in a pear tree.

On the third day of Christmas my true love sent to me
Three [French hens](#),
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.

So the rest of the list goes:

- four [calling birds](#)
- five [gold rings](#)
- six [geese](#) a-laying
- seven [swans](#) a-swimming
- eight [maids a-milking](#)
- nine [ladies](#) dancing
- ten [lords](#) a-leaping
- eleven [pipers](#) piping
- twelve [drummers](#) drumming

I recently read an interpretation of the Twelve Days of Christmas.

- 1 True Love refers to God
- 2 Turtle Doves refers to the Old and New Testaments
- 3 French Hens refers to Faith, Hope and Charity, the Theological Virtues
- 4 Calling Birds refers to the Four Gospels and/or the Four Evangelists
- 5 Golden Rings refers to the first Five Books of the Old Testament, the "Pentateuch", which gives the history of man's fall from grace.
- 6 Geese A-laying refers to the six days of creation
- 7 Swans A-swimming refers to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven sacraments
- 8 Maids A-milking refers to the eight beatitudes
- 9 Ladies Dancing refers to the nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit

- 10 Lords A-leaping refers to the ten commandments
- 11 Pipers Piping refers to the eleven faithful apostles
- 12 Drummers Drumming refers to the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostle's Creed.

I have no idea if that is true, but it's always lovely to plunge into the conspiracy theories about hidden meanings and alternative realities – even for Christmas.

That's another alternative reality, the translations of the Gospel text. If you were paying attention Christmas Eve, you may have noticed that the Gospel was read from the King James Bible.

Our current translations refer to a royal census or registration as the reason for Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

The King James makes that point: it was about the taxes.

It was about a king some 3,000 miles away being able to dictate what you owe and what you pay.

It was about a king having the power of life and death over you, your friends and your family.

It was about a time when the world was submerged in darkness and there was not light in it.

That was the time into which Jesus was born.

The Romans ruled Palestine, and had for nearly two hundred years.

There had been only a small window of time when Judea was free after the Syrian oppressors were thrown over when Jerusalem was ruled by the Jews.

And then the Romans came, and trampled out freedom and extinguished the lights of hope.

This was the time into which Jesus was born.

Wherever you walk, you encounter soldiers each day, and they carry spears and swords and arrows, and should one of them decide to end your life, they would be able to do so with impunity.

Life has no value in and of itself.

This was the time into which Jesus was born.

It was time of darkness.

Here in New Mexico, when you go out, away from the lights of towns and cities,
into the expanse of the desert, when there are only stars in the sky,
you can lift up your hand in front of your face, and you can't see it.
It is so dark that you are surrounded by the dark.
The lights of heaven seem so distant
and they do not seem to cast any light on us at all.
It was into this darkness that Jesus was born.

Imagine a flame burning in the darkness, drawing you in,
illuminating your life and the lives around you:
a light so intense that the darkness cannot stand against it.
The birth of Jesus was that light,
and that's the light we see in the darkness of the night.

How can this be?
Do you realize how absurd this event is?
Here we have Mary and Joseph in a stable,
and angels appear to shepherds to tell them that Jesus is the Son of God.
That's just silly.
I mean really, that like some pregnant couple showing up at the LA Cares,
only to be put up in a shed out back to have their kid.
And the Angels, well the angels fly over to the shelter at Pete's Place in Santa Fe
to tell the homeless to make their way over to Los Alamos
to see the birth of divine royalty.

It makes no sense.
Why would the King of the Universe have his son born in a stable
to people who are of questionable social value
and who have no influence over anything in their world.

Mary's a child and Joseph's a handyman, not even a craftsman.
They're going to live their lives hand to mouth,
and they're bringing into this world, the son of God.
It's absurd.
And who are the first to hear about it from the Angels?
The divine messengers take the word of God to a bunch of shepherders,
the dregs of society, who can find no other line of work,
and who no one will have anything to do with. They smell ...
but they are the ones invited to bear witness to the birth.
It makes no sense?

Or does it?

On the one hand, we have the divine light of love coming into the world, and on the other we have such absolutely human drama wrapped in the poverty of the world.

Such extremes in one event: human and divine – opposites and yet joined together in the birth of Jesus.

This all must mean something.

In Jewish tradition, the Scriptures operate at three levels.

On the first, the Scriptures tell the story and it is understood in the historical context of that day and time.

On the second, the story fits into the tradition of the Scriptures and the events that preceded and the events that followed the story.

On the third, the Scripture and the Story must be read in the contemporary context and what it means today to us.

We see the story of Jesus and Mary and Joseph as the birth of the Messiah in the time of the Roman occupation.

We fit the story of the birth of Jesus in the context of the tradition of a transition from the times of the Prophets into the birth of the Messiah to reform the Temple tradition.

And the third, what does the birth of Jesus mean for us today?

For me, the birth of Jesus means that we need to redefine what birth means each and every day.

We have to begin to understand the birth of children as divine events.

We must begin to treat the lives we are given as divine gifts.

We each need to remember that when we were born,

We, each and every one of us, was special – a divine gift to the world.

And we need to look at the world as place awaiting the next special child.

Each child born should be thought of as a messiah.

Each child born should be understood as a life that can change the world.

Each child should be nurtured, educated, cherished, encouraged, praised and loved each and every day of their life.

That is what the nativity means to us today,
the opportunity to bring the messiah into the world,
and the challenge to remold the world into a better place.
Each child brings the possibility of light into the world that continues in darkness.
Each child carries the light to lead the world further away from the darkness.

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed:

“The People who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.”

Paul writes to Titus:

When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,
he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done,
but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the
Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our
Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs
according to the hope of eternal life.

We are heirs to the light.

Let that light shine from your hearts to greet the coming days.

Amen.