

Sermon for Christmas Day
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico
December 25, 2022

Isaiah 52:7-10
Psalm 98
Hebrews 1:1-4,(5-12)
John 1:1-14

Merry Christmas and welcome to the morning after.

Our conception of the birth of Jesus
is mired in the pastels of Hallmark cards
and golden glow of television specials:

Mary is always sweet, clean and serene.
Joseph stands stoically by at all times.
Jesus never cries.
Sentimental images.

In all likelihood, Mary is barely a teenager.
She is terrified – no matter how many angels reassure her.
Ask any expectant father, Joseph is worried and perplexed
and at his wit's end – unable to provide for his family,
even just a place to stay the night – his responsibility.
Jesus is a baby – fully human and fully divine.
I'm willing to bet he's crying his heart out between feedings.

I asked myself, why would God, a loving divine Father,
Leave the couple who is bearing his son into the world – ALONE,
Unaided, left to their own devices to find a bed for the night?

The Christian tradition records only what we know of the birth of Jesus from the Gospels of
Matthew and Luke.

However, according to Celtic myth handed down from the Fifth Century,
God did not leave the Holy Family alone,
God sent help in the form of a Saint to midwife Mary.

The legend goes like this:
Brigid was a pagan in Ireland who converted to Christianity
Her and became Brigid.
She was a believer and did much good for the people of Ireland.
She was a nun and an abbess of a monastery.

According to tradition, she migrated to northern Scotland,
where her name became Bride.
Miracles are attributed to her
and she was a holy woman the rest of her days.

The legend tells the story at her last Christmas,
near the end of her life, she was asked to give more of herself to God.
Angels came and carried her through time and space
to the stable in Bethlehem so she could assist the quite young Mary
in delivering the Christ child into the world.

So I've read of St. Bride of the Isles in Celtic legends,
and researched the tales.
According to Celtic tradition,
Bride stayed with the Holy Family
and became a teacher to the young Jesus.

I wrote a poem telling the Christmas tale, which was set to music by an Irish composer under
commission of the Santa Fe Women's Ensemble.
With your permission, I'd like to share the poem.

**A Christmas Telling
Of St. Bride of the Isles
By Raymond Raney**

On that silent night of mystery
When sang the world of joy to be,
Angels harkened shepherds sleeping,
And stars beckoned come and see.

None did see the angels bearing
An elder saint to Mary's side
There to comfort and deliver
A babe to breathe and then to cry.

Holy Mother, Holy Maiden,
Holy Family, Holy Child,
From Holy Isles was she carried
To kneel and tend the infant mild.

Spirit of Eire once forged Brigid.
Came Bride from across the sea.
Like the Celtic Knot she circled,
Her life and soul eternally.

Crossing, Twining, Interweaving,
Circling, Winding, inbetweening.
Hewn from blessed oak beginning,
Wed by vows to Christ the King.

I am she, though most forgotten,
Amidst the cries I eased the pain.
There among the lambs so gathered,
I cherished words the shepherds sang.

With my songs I calmed the Virgin
As she sought to bear God's own.
And there I soothed the fearful Mary,
And at his birth did I belong.

With my tears I washed his body
Word made flesh and all made one.
Joyous night of celebration
Angels sang to Christ alone.

With my hands I touched the Maiden
In her face God's love I found,
Knowing she will grieve his passion,
And her tears will wet the ground.

For this moment I am with him,
by his side, I kneel and pray.
I will teach him, I will tell him,
knowing more than I can say.

God does not leave us to fend for ourselves.
If we open our hearts to the love
given to us on that Christmas so long ago,
we can know what it is to be held in the arms of a loving God.

Imagine if you will, you are in Bethlehem that morning.
You walk by the stable and see any number of people
who come and go from the stables.
You wonder what they are looking at.
So, you walk over and in your turn you enter the stable.
A man is standing there, steadied by his staff.
A young girl sits beside a makeshift cradle.
They're both looking at the child.
They welcome you and beckon you forward.
You approach and as you look you see a face.
It is a baby and when the babe sees you, he smiles.
You feel yourself smiling in return.

As you leave the stable,
you carry with you this sense of joy.
It warms you.

As you go on your way, you can't help but smile.

I've seen it many times,
when folks see the faces of the youngest of us.

Remember your look
when you saw the faces of your own children,
particularly when they are sleeping.

From their eyes, God bestows on each of us a blessing:
Live in Hope.
Live in Joy.
Live in Love.

I ask something of you this morning.
Carry the love we share with each other at Christmas,
and give it away to everyone you meet.

! Feliz Navidad !