Luke 2:1-7, [8-20]

Christmas Day

12/25/20

St. James Episcopal Louisa

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Year B

***“What Child Is This”*** is one of my favorite Christmas hymns.The words written by William Chatterton Dix (1837-1898) begin, “What child is this, who, laid to rest on Mary’s lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet with anthem’s sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping? This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing: haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary.”

What child is this?

I can’t imagine being Mary and I can’t imagine that she had any idea really what child this was that she was holding.

The whole story is one of strangeness and unexpectedness. Which I am finding I have found some comfort in this Christmas season, as this whole season has been strange and unexpected, without our normal traditions and customs. To not be able to sing as a congregation alone brings grief. To not be able to gather together to worship for the protection and health of our neighbors and ourselves - while understandable and necessary is heart-wrenching.

It has raised the question, “How do we deal with strangeness and unexpectedness? How do function when the world is not operating like we want it to- like we are used to?”

 For Mary, the Christmas story began more than a year earlier when an old man was serving his time as a priest in the temple. He was from the tribe of Levi and it was his turn to offer sacrifices and officiate in the temple in Jerusalem. He was following the routine that he knew so well. He was alone inside the Holy place when he was surprised by an angel who appeared and gave him the good news that he and his elderly wife were going to have a child. He reminded the angel of the cold, hard facts of life; he was an old man and his wife was not young herself. Although they had wanted a child for decades, it had not happened for them. He had already resigned himself to their fate. At his questioning or some say doubting, Zechariah suffered a consequence. He was struck mute for his unbelief and was told he would not speak again until after the baby was born.

 Six months later, this same angel, named Gabriel, made another visit - he appeared to Mary and gave her the shocking news that she also was going to have a son.

 Gabriel shared with Mary that she was going to have a child conceived by the Holy Ghost. Two strange and unexpected, inexplicable events is how the Christmas story begins.

So while I would like to turn our attention to the wonder of what this day signifies to Christians around the world - that God has become man and dwelt among us - this may be a good year for you to ponder the strangeness and unpredictability of the Christmas story and reflect upon the strangeness and unpredictability.

We are a people that like to plan our days. We want to know what happens next - we want to know so we can plan - we will know what to pack, how to dress, what to cook - the wonder of Mary is that she truly had no idea what her days would be like. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she would conceive, she replied, “Behold I am a servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1: 26-38)

What would it be like to raise this child - what was it like to hear from the shepherds that day two years later as they came to visit and see her child - “Hey on our way here a multitude of heavenly host appeared to us, praising God and before that an angel appeared to us and told us that “to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah the Lord.”

Things unfolded bit-by-bit to Mary. That is truly a faith story of Christmas - what would it be like for us to calmly accept things as they unfold, bit-by-bit? To say “I am a servant of the Lord, let it be according to your word.”

The passage tells us, that Mary pondered these things in her heart. I bet she did. So maybe we can look to Mary and learn from her.

Each step was revealed day-by-day. She did not know what tomorrow would bring; she took each day as it came, carrying this child in her, giving birth, and raising him - and learning I am sure each day. It was being revealed to Mary as it is revealed to us. Moment by moment.

Today we celebrate the coming of the Christ Child.

Today signifies the beginning of “God with us.” This child will grow and become a man. And he would continue showing us what God was like. He would do what the Old Testament writings and rituals could only point toward. He is our clearest revelation of what God is really like.

And so while we may be in a season of strangeness and unexpectedness and this Christmas is different for us than any other in our lifetime, let us truly pause and worship. Christ is with us.

We read the words Christ spoke in our Gospel readings each week, we listen to the stories he told, we watch how he treated people, because his words and actions reveal God to us, and in a time of uncertainty, we DO have certainty.

This, this is Christ the King. Amen.