Christmas Eve

St. James Episcopal

Rev. Dr. Jennifer L. Lazzuri

12/24/2020

Outdoor Worship

Evening Prayer.

Luke 1: 26-38

Tonight as we gather together to recall the Christmas story and to recognize the significance of tomorrow - a day that as Christians we celebrate the incarnation, when God became man, nothing is the same.

And yet, in this year, where nothing is the same - the Christmas story is.

It is comforting to recall the story of the angel announcing the coming birth to Mary. We travel with Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem and the manger. The shepherds arrive and worship the new born king. The story Christmas story brings us back to the true reason for the season.

And comfort is something we could all use at this time. This Christmas has been different - it has been unsettling. We have had none of our traditional comforts and rituals, our traditional carols - we are outside together now.

And so it is okay to be reminded that the first Christmas also involved lots of disruption and chaos.

For all the comfort and security that this season provides me, it is easy for me to forget that the first Christmas season brought lots of disruption and chaos.

It began months earlier, when the Angel, Gabriel, appeared to a virgin named Mary. She was pledged to marry a man named Joseph. I don’t know how much you know about angels, so I’ll start with a basic principle first. Whenever an Angel appears to you and starts off with Greeting, “Don’t be afraid” you might as well get ready to hear something that is going to scare the daylights out of you. And when an angel says “fear not” you’re probably about to get a message that will rock your world. At least that’s the way it worked with Mary. After the Angel tried to calm her down by telling her not to fear, (I’m not so sure how well that works any way), The Angel gave her news that would change her life forever, “You’re getting ready to have a baby, you will name him Savior. He will be called the son of the most high. God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will reign over the house of Judah for ever and ever—there will be no end to his kingdom.” How do you respond to a statement like that? What can Mary say? Mary may not have been a sophisticated city girl, but she knew a little bit about the natural course of things. She could have said, “Wait a minute, I didn’t just fall of the pumpkin cart. I know how things work. I’ve never been with a man, how am I going to have a baby?” The angel finishes the pronouncement. “The Holy Spirit will over shadow you and the holy one to be born will be called ‘Son of God.’ Nothing is impossible with God.” Sure enough the words that the angel spoke came true. This story that brings such comfort and stability to our rocky world brought disruption and radical change to Mary’s. Not knowing all the disruption that this would bring to her life, Mary makes the kind of commitment that the Lord requires, “I am the Lord’s servant, may it be as you said.”

The commitment of faith is always toward the unknown. Not knowing all that would transpire, Mary trusted herself into God’s care. Not only would Mary conceive a child in a way never heard of before, her child would be the one to bring salvation to earth’s inhabitants. We’re not told of all the disruption that this brought to Mary’s life. Not a word is spoken from or about Mary’s parents, nor is there anything said about Joseph’s family. I don’t know anything about how Mary was treated in her hometown Nazareth, but knowing human nature, I doubt life was easy for her.

Stable scenes are a favorite part of our Christmas cards and nativity scenes, but I can speak for myself when I say I wouldn’t have wanted to birth a baby in a stable.

But this is where Jesus was born and he grew into adulthood - and ordinary people were asked to “follow him”. Follow Him into God’s unknown and unpredictable future.

We can all attest that this past year has been one of unpredictability. I feel confident not one of us suspected last year as we gathered for Christmas Eve, that this year we would be outside, in lawn chairs, distanced, not singing and wearing masks.

Life is unpredictable. Life is full of the unknown. So is faith. Tonight we think of Mary and her step of faith, and I think we all may be there on some level. We don’t really comprehend this past year, we don’t know what the future holds - Mary responded with a simple “I am the Lord’s Servant” .

Tonight let us welcome into our lives, our church, our community the one who takes us where we have never been before; the one who makes us into people we could never have become on our own, and promises to be with us along the way.

Let us go to the stable, and let us worship Him; then leaving the stable behind, may we follow Him into whatever the future holds.

AMEN