

Christmas Eve 2015
Christ Lutheran Church, Soldotna
The Rev. Randy Parshall

Voice 1: I love the Christmas season. It is my favorite time of the year. There is a feeling of excitement and anticipation. There is something special about the birth of a child, especially this child, for with this child comes the promise of hope; however, sometimes we get so caught up in the warm glow (and there's nothing wrong with that) but we get so caught up in that that we try to keep Jesus in the manger. If we do not remember that he grew and showed us a new way of life, a better way of life then we miss out on what this night is all about. The baby and the man, Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter are tied together and there is no separating them from one another. Tonight we want to tie these together through a combination of scripture and an article columnist Sydney Harris' wrote a number of years ago: "If Jesus were Alive Today?"

If there should be, on Christmas night, a second coming, would there not be soon a second crucifixion? And this time, not by Romans or Jews, but by those who proudly call themselves Christians? I wonder.

Voice 2: In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. (This was the first enrollment when Quirinius was governor of Syria.)...

Voice 3: Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. I will therefore chastise him and release him.

Voice 1: I wonder how we today would regard and treat this man with his strange and frightening and "impractical" doctrines of human behavior and relationships. Would we believe and follow, any more than the masses of people in his day believed and followed?

Voice 2: And all went to be enrolled to their own cities. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

Voice 3: But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. He released Barabbas, the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, who they asked for, but Jesus he delivered up to their will.

Voice 1: Would not the militarists among us assail him as a cowardly pacifist because he urges us not to resist evil?

Voice 2: And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered.

Voice 3: And when they came to the place which is called the skull, there they crucified him and two criminals – one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do".

Voice 1: Would not the nationalists among us attack him as a dangerous internationalist because he tells us we are all one flesh?

Voice 2: And she brought forth her first-born son and wrapped him in strips of cloth

Voice 3: And they cast lots to divide his garments.

Voice 1: Would not the wealthy among us castigate him as a troublemaking radical because he bars the rich from entering the kingdom of heaven?

Voice 2: And laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. And in that region there were shepherds out in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night.

Voice 3: And the people stood by watching.

Voice 1: Would not the liberals among us dismiss him as a dreamy vagabond because he advises us to take no thought for the morrow, to lay up no treasures upon earth?

Voice 2: And an angel of the Lord appeared to them. And the glory of the Lord shown around them. And there were filled with fear! But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all people. For to you is born this day in the city of David, a savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Voice 3: But the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others! If he is the Christ of God, God's chosen one, let him save himself.

Voice 1: Would not the religious leaders among us denounce him as a raging heretic because he cuts through the cords of ritual and commands us only to love God and our neighbors?

Voice 2: And this will be a sign for you

Voice 3: And while the sun's light failed, the curtain of the temple was torn in two. And Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"

Voice 1: Would not the sentimentalists among us deride him as a cynic because he warns us that the way of salvation is narrow and difficult? Would not the Puritans among us despise and reject him because he eats and drinks with publicans and sinners, preferring the company of winebibbers and harlots to that of "respectable" church members?

Voice 2: You will find the babe wrapped in strips of cloths

Voice 3: Then Joseph of Arimathea took down the body of Jesus and wrapped it in a linen shroud.

Voice 2: And lying in a manger.

Voice 3: And they laid him in a rock-hewn tomb.

Voice 1: Would not the sensual among us scorn him because he fasts for 40 days in the desert, neglecting the needs of his body? Would not the proud and important among us laugh at him when he instructs the 12 disciples the he who would be "first" should be the one to

take the role of the least and serve all? Would not the worldly wise and educated among us be aghast to hear that we cannot be saved except we become as children, and that a little child shall lead us?

(PAUSE AS READER TWO AND THREE SWITCH STORIES)

Voice 3: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people of God's favor."

Voice 2: The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid, and returned and prepared spices and ointments.

Voice 3: And when the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened that the Lord has made known to us!"

Voice 2: And on the first day of the week at early dawn they went to the tomb.

Voice 3: And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

Voice 2: And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. But when they went in, they did not see the body.

Voice 3: And when the shepherds saw the baby lying in the manger, they made known the saying which had been told them concerning the child.

Voice 2: While they were perplexed about this, suddenly, two men, stood by them in dazzling apparel, and they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how he told you when he was in Galilee that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again?"

Voice 3: And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds had told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.

Voice 2: And they did remember his words, and returning to the tomb they told all this to the eleven.

Voice 3: And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen just as it had been told them.

Voice 1: Would not each of us in his own way find this man's saying and doing to be so threatening to our ways of life, so much at odds with our rooted beliefs, that we could not tolerate him for long? I wonder.

The celebrations will soon be over and fade away and when they are gone Jesus remains, not the cute little baby in the manger but the man, the Son of God who calls us to leave the old behind – to draw near to God and to live a different life. So, live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you for the world in which we live is desperately in need of it.