

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
The Reverend Rick Veit
12242516

Merry Christmas everyone. (Ring the little bell. Ring the large bell)

Merry, according to Webster's Dictionary, means full of gaiety or high-spirited...marked by or offering festivity...delightful, entertaining, brisk. Synonyms include gala, glad, happy, and joyful.

Christmas, or *christesmaeste* in Old English – Christ's Mass means celebration of Christ, the Messiah. Really, it is a celebration of God, who has given us a Wonderful Counselor: a King who is there to guide us...a Mighty God: strong and courageous...an Everlasting Father: a personal God, one who is in relationship with us, one who will never leave us, who cares for us and loves us forever, never stopping, in our ups and despite our downs, for eternity...Prince of Peace: one who leads us, all of humanity, in the midst of controversy, America and Syria, Israel and Palestine, Russia and Ukraine, black people and police officers, straight folks, gay, and transgendered, men and women, people from California, North Carolina, and Wyoming, Shiite and Sunni, Conservative, Liberal, Christian and Jew, Atheist and Agnostic, a God who is leading us all to walk and live in peace with each other, in the midst of our beautiful diversity.

Tonight, we celebrate, we are high-spirited, in festival, in joy. Welcome to the party that never ends. And all are invited, those with money and those with none, those who are healthy and those deep in addiction and illness, those who are considered by some to be good-looking and those who are considered ugly. Tonight, we celebrate that God loves us, warts and all, complicated and simple, just like the Christ child.

There were lots of good teachers and rabbis during the time of Jesus. Many kings and government leaders were known to perform healings and miracles back then. Most of them were probably educated.

Then there was the other king, Jesus, who was the Christ, the Messiah. He was a profound teacher, one who performed healings and miracles, but was poor, vulnerable. He did not come from any prominent family. In fact, he was born in controversy. Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married. And in their culture, engagement was considered as binding as the actual marriage. Oh yes - and Mary was pregnant with someone else's baby. Apparently, it was God's child. Adulterous women could be stoned to death. Joseph could have demanded her death, but instead, chose to preserve her life by quietly divorcing her. After an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, with the confidence and spirit of the Lord in him, he courageously decided to stay and support Mary and love her, and love their child, one that was not his own.

Next, angels appeared to other people, shepherds who were living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. They were terrified. But, just like in the case of Mary and Joseph, the angel brought a peace. "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news..." The news would be full of joy for all people, for *all* people, not just some, not just the educated. The Savior has come. He is the Messiah, the Lord. Do not be surprised. He will seem like a

“nothing.” Well, not a “nothing,” but he is not the king you were expecting. He will not be the great military leader who will wipe out your enemies. He will not provide you with every worldly bit of sustenance. In fact, he is just a baby. *Your* king is a baby. He will need everything from his mother to survive, just like every other baby. He will need to be protected and loved, fed and clothed. And that is what Mary did. Joseph was there doing the same. This king would be different.

And, at that moment, the celebration skyrocketed into the stratosphere. A multitude of the heavenly host were present with the angels, saying, screaming, singing, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” YES, we who follow Jesus, as we continue to grow and follow Jesus, we will become one of those faithful people, one of those Christians, filled with joy, filled with the Spirit, occasionally and randomly raising our hands up, praising God, becoming what others consider to be foolish nuts. Believable? Unbelievable. People *will* think we are strange. And we are strange. But we are confidently strange in the Lord, our lives filled with miracles, filled with lifting up of hands, singing, whether we can sing well or not, giving, giving whether we have it in us to give or not. With God, all things are possible.

Just a side note: did you read this week that Christmas Caroling without permission is illegal in Cheyenne? We are still keeping this ordinance from 1897 on the books. “Persons desiring to deliver a public address or engage in singing or playing of musical instruments (sorry Betsy) or give any other form of entertainment or advertise upon any streets, alleys, sidewalks or other thoroughfares or public property of the city must state the location for and the time when such address, entertainment or advertising is to be given and obtain a written permit from the mayor.” I have already contacted Mayor-elect Marian Orr’s office about our sing-fest this evening. I just hope we don’t get cited. I think she will be okay with it. The ordinance is found in a chapter titled “Circuses, carnivals and amusement rides.”

Cuff me. For this and for my faith, I will continue to sing. “Jingle bells, jingle bells.” “Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King.” Ye-hah, Cheyenne St. Marksters, you bunch of renegades.

Now, back to our Merry celebration.

God approaches Mary and places the Messiah, a baby, inside of her. Angels approach Mary and Joseph. Angels approach other people, delivering God’s messages. And the people respond to God’s message. They follow through with God’s requests, His mission. The shepherds go to Bethlehem to see the child. They tell Mary and Joseph what the angels had told them. Mary treasured all these words and pondered the words of the Lord in her heart. And the people, the shepherds, continued glorifying and praising God. Bunch of nuts, Christian nuts.

That is what we are today. People, passionate people, living in the midst of miracles every day from our Lord. Party animals. God is giving us reason to celebrate, not just at Christmas time, but every day of our lives. For Jesus, the Messiah, is alive in us. And God is there to guide our every move through Jesus.

I have talked with two people recently who had strange and holy experiences in their lives. God or an angel or Jesus approached them, touched them, spoke to them. God was alive in and all about them. Profound! Real!

Sing to the Lord a new song. Sing it to the whole earth, to everyone, the people who are easy to talk with and the ones who are more difficult to talk with. Keep your eyes and ears open every moment of every day for those opportunities to practice random and not-so-random acts of kindness. Keep your eyes and ears open to receive, to see and hear things, to recognize things in a different light.

When has the presence of the Lord reached out and filled you? Were they words or some experience? Did you treasure it and ponder the Lord in your hearts like Mary? Did you give glory and praise to God? Or did you just go on with your day as if nothing ever happened, perhaps embarrassed by the power of God in you? Do not be afraid.

This is your day, you are well on your way, to be who you are, to be that great star. That was not Dr. Seuss, but Rev. Veit. Probably close to Seuss though.

And so I wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy new year. And may the Lord be with you and in you, and may you be inspired to give glory and praise to God in each and every day, occasionally or always acting foolish and courageous for Jesus.

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Amen.

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