

A Reading from the the Prophetic Book of Isaiah (61:10 – 62:3)

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Galatians

Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian. Indeed, when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

John i: 1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John bore witness to him, and cried, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.'") And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

Introduction

Wonderful Lessons and Carols, Christmas Eve, Christmas Morning—but In the days after Christmas, perhaps we all have a strange feeling—

Maybe we rub our eyes and wonder, maybe we feel a bit let down...

What a vision—“*the vagueness and the clarity of a dream...*”

Fled is that music: do I wake or sleep?

The old peace song of the sixties: “*Last night, I had the strangest dream...*”

N. B. – The church calendar doesn’t make it any easier—

St. Stephen’s Day

The Slaughter of the Innocents

Yes, in the days that follow Christmas ...on the first Sunday of Christmastide we could be asking ourselves:

Was it a dream? Is it a dream? Or Is it a dream come true?

I say, on our behalf, through our worship and the very fact of coming here—it’s true, it’s true...

It’s true—by the very beating of our hearts, every syllable is saying, It’s true, it’s true.

The Evidence of the Heart

I’m often quite taken up with theology—not so much by the doctrines it devises or the subtleties and mysteries it codifies into propositions—but with its implicit amazed assumption that God’s wisdom and mind are an astonishment...

But none of this wondrous speculation is a matter of evidence—the “evidence” we have is not assent to a principle or precept, but a focused fierce acknowledgement in the heart—

I believe that our deepest assent to our faith in Christ is that we want to believe in Him, and that is why we do...

C. S. Lewis: Is our faith “wish-fulfillment? You bet—but a wish we never knew we entertained until we realized it was true.

And that implies a matter of the will more than the mind—our wisdom and reason are not required so much as our “Yes” to God’s “Yes.”

And if so, then all of this is a matter not of reason, but of revelation--

From “A Christmas Carol”:

Bob Cratchit:

What Would Make Him Take Such Leave of His Senses?

Tiny Tim

Christmas?

It’s fair to say that the Gospel is either true or preposterous—either a revelation or an absurdity

And that “choice” is nowhere so true as in this First Sunday of Christmastide

Either the Word is made Flesh or we are nowhere and nothing and nobody—
Cast into a vanity that even Solomon never dreamed of....

Either a Dream or Everything Else a Dream

“We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep”

Half true—but “rounded” with the love of God...

Everything—our transitory lives and even our religious convictions—it’s all a dream until God is revealed as Christ Jesus

Q: Why would we acknowledge anything more than the power of God unless Jesus is truly God—very God of very God—unless He became a little baby

It is one thing to have the mysterious and easy sense that the hugeness into which we’re born is of something or someone we can call God—and that the Word (the Mind, the Expression, the Decree) of that entirely Huge Other has brought it about—but what good does it do us?

--Awe? Yes—but what love would we owe to such an infinitude?,

--What approach could we make, what thanks could we give?

But what if that Word—that Mind, that Expression, that Decree) was also an infant so frail and exposed to the elements that He would have died were it not for the warmth of his mother’s embrace?

“Your most awesome work was done/In the frailty of your son...”

Michael Card

What if the God who, as Isaiah puts it in the beautiful Christmas Day passage—what if God ***has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations*** is the baby in the manger?

What if that holy arm is not so much the triumphalist power of God envisioned by the prophet Isaiah, but the heart-stopping authority of God’s love in the frail baby lifting his bare infant’s arm to the light of His mother’s eyes?

What if that Word is truly known to us only when we believe it walked the earth, breathed our air, wept our tears, loved our little daily blessings, suffered our large and little troubles?

Indeed, when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, says Galatians

--What if the Word has indeed been made flesh?

--What if God’s love is not an abstraction muttered or thundered through the Cosmos but a baby who only later will learn to speak?

--What if that baby is Emmanuel—God with us?

--What if God is one of us playing, as we must, by the rules His father has made?
CSL--Well, then--Then our hope, our gratitude, our joy is boundless—

Coming To Our Senses

“I haven’t taken leave of my senses, Bob...I’ve come to them...”

Then we take leave of our prudent reasons and our expertise and our wrongful worship of power even when it’s God’s power, our self-absorption (and most of all the sin that so easily besets us)

--and we too come out of the fitful fever of those dreams

We too come to our senses—not to careful reasoning but abandoned love...

“Finally, it’s not a matter of reason; finally, it’s a matter of love...”

That is true for God as well as for us—

“The heart hath its reasons that reason knoweth not... Pascal

Then, we see our alleged wisdom and sharp-eyed shrewdness and petty calculation fall away before the mighty meekness of our living God

We see the Word made flesh--And suddenly it does indeed all “make sense.”

Not to our minds as much as to our hearts, our hopes, our doubts, our faith—our love—oh, most of all—our love....

And maybe that’s the sweetest beauty of Christmas—

We have awakened from our fitful dreams and selfish fantasies, just as Scrooge did—

“We have not taken leave of our senses—we have come to them...”

Our dream of Christmastide? It’s true, it’s true, it’s true...

The word indeed dwells with us **full of grace and truth...**

It’s true, it’s true, it’s true

... we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, says the Evangelist John—and so have we, by the witness and affirmation in our deepest hearts.

We have come to our senses, and it all makes sense.

Praise God for that awakening and that everlasting hope!

Praise God that it’s true, it’s true, it’s true...

Merry Christmas on this, the 6th Day of Christmas! AMEN