

Sermon for 22 December 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Scriptures: Micah 5:2-5a; Psalter, Page 199 : Luke 1:47-55 "Canticle of Mary" ("*Magnificat*")  
(Response: **O Come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord**, *Tune 234*), Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:29-45

Sermon

It's already happened.

I don't mean to disappoint you, but Christmas has come and gone.

According to today's lessons of scripture, God has demonstrated that he has solved the world's problems and marched right on forward to keep the world together and keep on blessing us with second chances until the idea of forgiving me not seven times, but seventy-seven times, like Jesus told Peter to, stands not just for good news, but for eternal hope and incredible resolutions and as our song insists, "Amazing Grace," that saved a wretch like ME.

All those times we read last year in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus kept telling people, "Don't say anything;" "Don't tell anybody;" all those examples of the disciples just not getting it, not understanding good news was already near, had come home to roost in these first few lines of the Gospel we're focusing on this year, the Gospel of Luke.

I just recently joined the Baltimore Choral Arts Society, and these past few days have been a whirl of rehearsals and not just one, not two, but three Christmas concerts down at the Meyerhoff this week-end! And you know what, it's reassuring to me that so many people have come to celebrate Christmas with us, in this time when we say over and over that Christianity is not holding people any more. I'm not saying all those songs and musical beauties proved that the audience was all Bible-following ... but there's enough in our bones and tones as a nation to make us realize the Jesus story isn't dead among us, or even less important underneath it all to mark us and make our future somehow described, in the lessons we learn here every week, and in every day we do devotions and try to live like Jesus..

I am saying that this Sunday, when we light the candle of peace, and read about John the Baptist's mother Elisabeth and then hear young Mary accept a new version of all those Bible tales of women who became after they had long waited, such as Hannah, and Sarah, and .. well, you get the point that today's story is different, and what looks like the same old tragic tale of wars and selfishness has a different, and more hopeful flavor than before Jesus the unlikely Messiah was born.

I'll leave you with the rest of the story to roll itself out in the coming days of Christmastide, and onward into and through the season of Epiphany. Keep showing up, keep reading the Bible texts and praying, and you will see how predictable it all really has been all along. From the

looks of things, we --- here in Maryland, with our local crime news (did you read the paper this week, right around the corner from us here? or hear the holy government Mess we're in this very week-end in Washington,D.C.?) we're in real trouble, along with everyone else. That makes it especially interesting to study and sing and .... yes, practice praying ... about peace and a poor family that couldn't even find lodging when they went to register ... but that's Tuesday, and next Wednesday, and on into New Year's.

Right now, take heart from these messages we read from a long history of faith. Try to look up instead of down when you think of your own time and the things that get you down. Hear us say, this day, this last day of training in waiting that we call Advent. Take courage from the word on every page we've shared today, every song we've sung, every gesture of friendship we have given and received ... This is good news. Already, before we get it all told, love is with us, we can love in both senses ... our neighbors as ourselves, and ourselves as precious children of God Almighty, our Spirit-giver, our trustworthy, almighty, down close and reliable energy and savior.

Do come. Do stay. Do live the story that's been unfolding for us this recent weeks. It belongs to you. And me. And ... thanks be to God, through our Lord, Jesus. Amen.