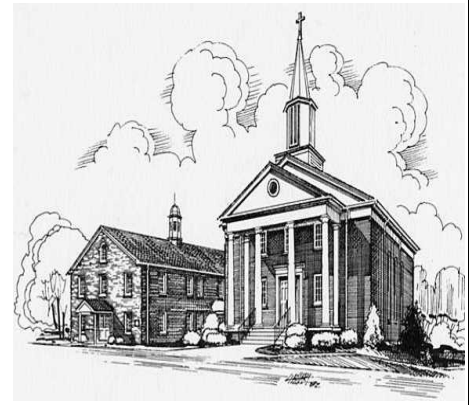


The Lessons Appointed for Use on
the Feast of

First Sunday after Christmas
All Years



Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalms 147:1-12

John 1:1-18

The Collect

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being 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 up 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 shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.

The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;

and you shall be called by a new name
that 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.

Psalm 147 or 147:13-21

Laudate Dominum

1 Hallelujah!

How good it is to sing praises to our God!
how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!

2 The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem;
he gathers the exiles of Israel.

3 He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.

4 He counts the number of the stars
and calls them all by their names.

5 Great is our LORD and mighty in power;
there is no limit to his wisdom.

6 The LORD lifts up the lowly,
but casts the wicked to the ground.

7 Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
make music to our God upon the harp.

8 He covers the heavens with clouds
and prepares rain for the earth;

9 He makes grass to grow upon the mountains
and green plants to serve mankind.

10 He provides food for flocks and herds
and for the young ravens when they cry.

11 He is not impressed by the might of a horse;
he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;

12 But the LORD has pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who await his gracious favor.

Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

John 1:1-18

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 came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept

him. 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 or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'”) From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

SERMON

It is the Sunday after Christmas in the year of our Lord 2015 and we still have this preposterous story before us. We have mapped the history of the universe down to a tiny fraction of a second after the instant of creation, we have sent men to the moon to play golf upon its gray dunes, and STILL we have this unreasonable story before us.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

How does a modern, rational person approach that sentence? What does it mean? The person being referred to is, of course, Jesus, a poor man of no celebrated family, living in a poor Roman province two millennia ago. In the Roman province of Judea, men and women of no distinguished families were as common as

fleas and the bones of all of them lie in anonymous charnel houses, skulls stacked with long bones or long ago disintegrated, and STILL we have this outlandish story about one of them. How in the world can this be? Why hasn't he been forgotten as well? Indeed, every reasonable impulse within us demands for him to have been forgotten. Why is this story hanging about?

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The story of the Incarnation as told by John nearly a century after the birth of Jesus is preposterous and outlandish because, frankly, there is no way to fit it into our understanding of how the world works without suspending our understanding of how the world works, and

we are very unwilling to do that. In our day and time, to do so irrational a thing is to brand yourself a little bit peculiar. This is the sin of arrogance which we all drink so deeply of. If a thing cannot be made to fit into “what we know” then that something is not real and advocates for it must be a little touched in the head.

But hold on here! If Jesus was an undistinguished poor man from an undistinguished village in the middle of nowhere, why is John bothering to write his account so long after Jesus' death? Why did this absurd story persist long enough for John to be aware of it, and persist, I might add, with sufficient force to motivate John to write his Gospel at all? It's unreasonable, I tell you!

People of Jesus' time held all manner of outlandish things to be true. They thought the world was flat, for instance. We've established that the world is not flat just as convincingly as we have established that people don't

rise from the dead, yet we discarded the flat earth model with scarcely a look backward and still we have the inexplicable story of the Incarnation before us. People are STILL talking about it AND being affected by it. It's almost enough to make us think that our perception of reality isn't, after all, all there is to it. Almost.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

Well, now! Isn't that just like us? Do we never entertain the thought that if the story of the Incarnation can't be pounded into shape so as to fit into our understanding, that perhaps it is our understanding, not the reality of the coming of Christ, which needs to be pounded into shape? No...we don't seriously entertain that thought. We are very like the water strider I spoke of last Sunday, a bug that lives out its life skating on the

surface tension of its pond and who believes, since that is all that appears to his senses, that the silvery surface of the water is all there is to reality. We still have this outlandish story before us, one that doesn't appear on the silvery surface of our pond. Why can we not see how absurd this story is? We're modern people! We believe in the power of logic and rational thought to lead us to truth. Every shred of rationality within us screams that this story just isn't rational.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! That's not rational thought! To accept that, I'd have to throw logic and rationality out the window and logic and rationality are my light in the world!

Yet the facts are before us. This story simply won't

go away. How can we explain this stubborn tenacity? How can this story persist in the face of everything we now know? We're not simple shepherds! We're sophisticated modern people.

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 or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

What we need here is some rational thought!

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")

We are enlightened people. We play golf on the moon because we can do math to seventeen decimal places. That is who we are!

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

I make my choices on rational considerations, not leaps of faith! To take such a leap of faith, I might become one of those peculiar people that go about volunteering for goody-two-shoes projects, and being generally insufferable!

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being 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 up before all the nations.

Merry Christmas, church. And a happy, absurd, and
fulfilling New Year.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Paul wrote to the churches he had founded in present-day Turkey as follows:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

In all his writings, Paul stresses the initiative of God – God's commitment to leading us from our error to the truth. The impulse to salvation begins with God, not with us. Our faith and trust in God, therefore, is not something in which we may take pride, but a confession that we have received the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, and thus an occasion for gratitude.

Until we meet again, may the Lord bless you, and keep you. May the Lord lift His countenance upon you, and be gracious to you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

Sermon Copyright © 2015 J. Stewart Schneider
