CHRISTMAS 1 2020

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December 27, 2020

Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org

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Pray:

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

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Our passage from Isaiah tells us that Yahweh – GOD – will clothe Israel with His righteousness before all the nations and that it will be a cause for praise to Him. This righteousness is not something produced by Israel itself; but something GOD gives them – v10 10 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. Thus, it defines a new status and, at the same time, defines a new pattern of behaviour, enabled by GOD’s grace. Israel will now be seen in a different light. Instead of being deserted and desolate, it will be a source of special delight to the LORD.

The word “vindication” used in verse 2 of chapter 62 is often interpreted as righteousness. Vindication focuses on the new status conferred by GOD’s salvation of His people and a new “Spirit-endowed” pattern of behaviour. Yahweh can now rejoice over His bride.

Our psalm today has 2 sections:

Part 1 begins with a call for heaven to praise the LORD and part 2, for the earth to praise the LORD. The psalm pictures creation as a 2-part choir – with praise resounding from the heavens matched by what arises from the earth and the sea.

Heidi Haverkamp – an episcopal priest and spiritual writer from Illinois in the U.S. has suggested that the Christmas season does not usually strike her as the perfect time to read Paul’s letter to the Galatians. But today’s reading gives us four joyful verses about adoption into God’s family, very much a part of incarnational – GOD in human flesh – theology. The God of time and the cosmos has been born on earth and of a human woman and invites us to live in the here and now – on earth, and in our bodies, as members of the body of Christ and God’s family. In Paul’s words, I hear six particular markers of what it means in the wake of the incarnation to be adopted as God’s family on Earth and in this particular time in history.

**God sent God’s Son.** Throughout history, God has sought out God’s people, but it was in a particular moment in history—in “the fullness of time”—that God was born as Immanuel, “God-with-us,” here on earth. God wants to be in relationship with us—not in an abstract way, but in such a way that we can feel connected, body and soul, in Christ, to God. Not just as members of an institution, but as members – parts and ligaments of Christ’s body.

**That we might receive adoption.** Adoption is something to be received; it is not forced on us. It is a gift. We belong to God and to one another, in love and freedom—not ownership or coercion. God came to dwell with us, not to force us into conformity but to offer us loving relationship.

**Adoption as children.** No one is a “birth” child of God except Jesus. As baptized Christians, no one belongs or looks more like God than anyone else; we have all been brought into the family, not born to it.

**Crying, “Abba! Father!”** We are invited into intimacy with God. God is inviting us to call to God with words like, “Abba! Father!” (or “Amma! Mother!”), and so inviting us to a closeness and familiarity. There is a physical closeness we have to our parents or first caregivers that is hard to describe; this is the closeness we are invited to feel to God.

**Not a slave, but a child.** In our baptism, we are not joining a business, an elite spiritual society, or a prison. We are not marked with a believers’ ID number; we are adopted into the big, loving (and certainly chaotic) family that is the church universal. We are called to be who God made us to be, with differing gifts and paths.

**And an heir.** In baptism, we receive the spiritual inheritance of God’s promises and the rich, complex, and living story of salvation—both in scripture and in the lives of our ancestors, mentors, and friends in the faith. And then we, too, will pass on this inheritance to those who come after us.

In this holiday season, when many of us are unable to spend time physically with our families, some might need especially to be reminded that being a member of God’s family—or of any chosen family at church, among friends, or at work—is a real and holy gift, especially if our family of origin is a painful or uncomfortable place for us. In baptism, we are marked as Christ’s own, no matter what distance we are from church or our siblings in the faith. As heirs of the day of Pentecost, we can be confident that the Holy Spirit is always active and among us, in our very bodies and souls. Church, even on Zoom or Facebook Live, is still where we can meet God, our Father and Mother, and meet one another, as fellow heirs and children of the promise.

Childbirth is generally thought of in today’s society as something simple and straightforward. But not always. Each mother could relate their own experiences that are probably NOT simple and NOT straightforward. The birth of the child is a continuation of the whole experience – that goes on throughout the whole of life.

The miraculous nature of conception and childbirth is a theme that runs through the Old Testament and is often seen in families that have only one child. Numerous women who were considered “barren” give birth to a child of hope – Rebekah, Hannah, Ruth and the mother of Samson. But the most important example is that of Sarah. Sarai was too old, as was Abram, to have and raise a child. But GOD gave them Isaac – a child of promise and hope for Abram, now called Abraham and Sarah for the future of a promised nation. The promised Messiah would come from this lineage and be given miraculously to Mary – someone never having engaged in sexual intercourse and who, with her husband-to-be would be parents of a child of hope for the whole world. These mothers were all like our mothers of today – who were gifted to have children to be loved and raised. Every family, whether gifted with many, few, or even no children, has a role to play in GOD’s dramatic story of salvation and shares in the miraculous gift of hope children represent. Each child has been willed by GOD to serve a unique purpose. And it was through the birth of one child that all of us share in the hope of salvation. As Simeon says in the Gospel of the new-born baby boy JESUS, in words otherwise known as the Nunc Dimittis:

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation:
which you have prepared in the sight of every people:
A light to reveal you to the nations: and the glory of your people Israel.

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Within the simple family from Nazareth, Simeon recognises the consolation and salvation for which he has been waiting his entire life. We could ponder what it was about this child and these parents that prompted him to utter the words he did. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that Simeon is given eyes to perceive the light of the world enfleshed in the newborn JESUS. JESUS is present in our daily lives as well; in the people we meet in our daily lives. Through the revelation of the Holy Spirit may we, too, be able to recognise and serve Him.

Today’s gospel ends with the image of the child JESUS growing and becoming strong as he is brough up by Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. Within their daily lives from the time of JESUS’ conception until the beginning of His public ministry, Mary and Joseph physically dwelt with the Word of GOD – attending to His needs, teaching Him and learning from Him. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul urges the community to “let the word of CHRIST dwell in us richly”. It is only through constant and dedicated reflection and meditation on this Word could the Colossians hope to be reflections of CHRIST in the world.

We come to know JESUS through word and sacrament. The words of the Bible illuminate our minds and lift our spirits to consider things not as human beings do but from the perspective of our divine and heavenly GOD: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In considering the life of the Holy Family in Nazareth, we might ponder how we can look at the events of our days as a constant living of the Word of GOD. How do we make room and space for this Word to dwell within us richly?

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**May we pray:**

Gracious GOD we give you thanks for the gift of the Holy Family and how they show us how to live in communion with you. Teach us always to be faithful to your word and to live in joy and with the wisdom of Mary, Joseph and their Son JESUS – who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one GOD, for ever and ever. Amen

Daily Prayer 2020

NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible – Zondervan – DA Carson General Editor

Living Liturgy – Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities 2021 – Year B 2021 – Rice, Johnson and Holyhead – Liturgical Press Collegeville Minnesota