

Gift of Christmas

Christmas Feelings: Part 7 “Gift of Christmas”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – January 7, 2024

Epiphany Sunday

Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Reflection: Psalm 72

Greeting: As for you, Bethlehem, though you are least significant, a ruler of Israel will come from you on behalf of the Lord, he will shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of our God, the people will dwell secure.

Prayer: Merciful God, renew us in your grace and mercy. May you guide us in celebrating the gifts of Christmas we carry with us. Help us once more to remember the nativity, and that we may rejoice in the coming of Jesus Christ our redeemer. Prepare our hearts for the feelings of Christmas that you stir with your steadfast love and strengthen by your faithfulness that endures forever. May you build us up with feelings of renewal and continued hope as we carry with us the celebration of the birth of our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, from this day forth and forevermore. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 72

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. May he live while the sun endures and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more. May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service. For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight. (Psalm 72:1-7,10-14 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 72 and hear of God's deliverance. We hear of kings bringing gifts to the God's chosen. That God's justice pours out for those who are in need. We connect these ideas with the gifts of Christmas that we celebrate on Epiphany. What are the feelings that you will carry forward from Christmas? What are the gifts that you share with others as we move into a new year? How can we share in the blessings of our savior? What are the feelings that

you find as we think about the many gifts of the season? How do you carry the miracle that is Christmas forward in the coming year?

Prayer: Lord, prepare our hearts for the feelings of Christmas as we continue on in this new year. That we come before you this day experiencing your grace as we remember the many gifts of the season. May your Holy Spirit guide us from darkness into the light of your love. As we come before you today, we bring to you the joys and concerns that we have spoken aloud together and shared in this place. We come to you silently with the worries and celebrations of our hearts. We pray you will help us to grow in faith through both sorrow and gladness. That through our laughter and our tears you will be with us. May we experience your mercy as you guide us in remembering the gifts of Christmas in a celebration of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 60, verse 1 through verse 6.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples, but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together; they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried in their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you; the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. (Isaiah 60:1-6 NRSV)*

Our next reading is from Ephesians chapter 3, verses 1 through 12.

This is the reason that I, Paul, am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you gentiles, for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was

in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access in boldness and confidence through faith in him. (Ephesians 3:1-12 NRSV)*

Our final reading is from Matthew, chapter 2, verses 1 through 12.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.' " Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. (Matthew 2:1-12 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

What a journey we have been on. We have prepared ourselves for the feelings of Advent, for hope, peace, joy, and love. We have celebrated the birth of our Savior. We have closed out one year and ushered in a new one. And today we welcome wise men bearing gifts to a new king. It is the gift of Christmas that closes our out Advent and Christmas series about all of our Christmas feelings. But today isn't so much about a feeling itself, but it is about the way that we will carry our feelings with us in the year to come. Because this closes out the Christmas season. We finish our Christmas journey with the story of Epiphany. I think it is important for us to think about how we are going to carry with us all of the feelings that we have explored over the last few weeks. We think about how we are going to carry those feelings with us until next Christmas. Because there is a whole year ahead of us now. There will be new adventures, new stories, new joys, and new tragedies. And because it is the future, there will be plenty of unknowns that we will need to work through in the coming year. We have plenty to do in sharing the joy of our Savior in the coming year, and that journey begins now. So, I wanted to think about the gift of Christmas as we think about these travelers laying gifts before a king. We have reflected upon the miracle of Christmas, the birth of our Savior, our Emmanuel, our God who is with us. Part of the gift of Christmas is that it is something that we may celebrate year to year to remind us of how close our God is to us. That it is there to remind us of all of those feelings that may wear down as the year moves along. That it renews us and gives us the strength that we need to carry on and push forward. It renews us and inspires us to once again go forth to share our journey in Christ. We discover with Christmas

that our hope is stronger. Our peace is more comforting. Our joy is overflowing. And our love is that much deeper. Our celebration of Jesus' birth has brought all of these things to the forefront so that we carry them with us in the new year. And today we think about those feelings as a gift. Both a gift that we receive and a gift that we may give. That our feelings are meant to be shared with one another throughout the year. That we will carry our Christmas feelings with us so that we strengthen each other in the mercy and grace of our God. We share them so that we can make them last all year, renewed whenever we remember the tremendous love of our Lord and remember that God is with us.

And I'm strengthened by our readings for today in wanting to carry our Christmas feelings with us. Our reading from Ephesians has Paul talking about his own ministry. That he is trying to reach out so that the gentiles know the promise of the gospel. That Jesus is for everyone. That he is happy that he has been able to bring the good news to people so that they can know Christ. That it is because of Christ that he has his boldness and confidence through faith. That Paul can share that message and carry it with him always. Isaiah points to our reading from Matthew. He is proclaiming that though there is great darkness that it will be overcome by the light. That God's goodness and mercy will be known and that people from many nations will come to honor God. That they will travel great distances to bring gifts of gold and frankincense as they come to praise God. That there will be a great joy for all people to know that salvation of God. And we do see people traveling a great distance to bring gifts in Matthew. It is there that we finish our nativity scene, with the introduction of the wise men from the east. They appear only in Matthew's account and they come to celebrate a new king. There is an uneasy tension in this story though, because the current king is not too happy to hear this news. He fears these men coming to celebrate this birth because of what it says about his own future. But they have come to pay this new king homage, and so they find out where he was prophesied to be born. With that knowledge, they head off for Bethlehem. They follow the star until it leads them to the home of Mary and Joseph. When they arrive, they celebrate with overwhelming joy. They enter the house and lay their gifts before Jesus. They give frankincense, gold, and myrrh. They honor this child who shall be a shepherd to the people of Israel. And with that they head back home by a different road, because they were warned in a dream that they should stay away from the current king, Herod. With Epiphany, we get the end of our Christmas story. We see them giving gifts much in the way that we give gifts to each other on Christmas. And with that, they head back to their homes after this very long journey. We don't know exactly how long it was, but we know that the star appeared 2 years before this. But now comes the waiting. In some ways, we will be waiting again to celebrate the birth of our Savior once again. We wait for the time where we renew our Christmas feelings and share with each other the gift of Christmas.

But in the meantime, our journey for this year has just begun. We will carry those feelings with us throughout the coming year. We hold them with us to strengthen one another and to help each other along the way. We follow Christ together on a journey into the new year.

A journey that we have decided to share together. So, as I thought about the gift of Christmas I thought about this year as a journey. That those wise men of the east didn't simply have a couple of weeks for their journey. They had a long road ahead of them. I was thinking about our own journey in that same way, as one that will last all year. A journey back to Bethlehem to witness the birth of our Savior. That we may experience the sights and the wonders along the way. That we will have many things happen throughout the year. That we will experience all that the new year has to bring. That we will travel through the dark valleys and over the pleasant hills. That we will have bright sunshine and dark rain clouds. And that our journey will carry us back to a child born and laid in a manger. A child celebrated with gifts and adoration. A child who signifies hope, peace, joy, and love. That we carry the miracle of his birth with us as we journey through an exploration of his teachings. As we explore his life, death, and resurrection throughout the year. So let our journey begin! A journey to share all of our Christmas feelings throughout the year with everyone that we meet. That we may share Christ with all that we know by loving our neighbor and loving our God with our whole being. Through it all we share the gifts that come from our Christmas feelings, spread out all along the way. That we can share with anyone anywhere because of the tremendous love we find with our Savior. That we walk secure because of our Emmanuel, our God always and forever with us. And every step of the way, we know that Christ is the true gift of Christmas. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Christmas Feelings

Our Advent and Christmas series is called “Christmas Feelings.” We will be looking at the feelings we have from Advent, Christmas, New Year’s Day, and Epiphany. Each week takes on a different feeling and how we carry them with us as we look forward to another year with Christ. Let’s celebrate our Christmas feelings!

12/3: Hope of Advent	12/10: Peace of Advent	12/17: Joy of Advent
12/24: Love of Advent	12/24: Celebration of Christmas	
12:31: Old and New Year	1/7: Gift of Christmas	

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Calvin St. Michael	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams		

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