



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Saturday, December 25, 2021
Christmas Day

The Solemn Eucharist of the Nativity
11am

+
A Sermon by
The Rev. Matthew Moretz, *Vicar*
on
John 1:1-14
+

The Door to Christmas

Make me pure, Lord; thou art holy; make me meek, Lord: thou wert lowly; now beginning, and always: now begin on Christmas Day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Merry Christmas!

It's a joy to be with you, wherever you may be, on this most holy day, this deep and timeless day, one that somehow makes all things fresh and new. It is a birthday, after all. That's kind of day when the wonder of life, its celebrated beginning, its mystical passage, the marvel of existence itself, it shines out of everything. And now much more does reality glisten on this the birthday of Our Lord, the one who made us and makes us whole?

Every Christmas opens doorways within, not only to the first Christmas, but to all the others, especially the ones we've lived. If some Christmases are lacking, there are others upon which to dwell, ones that can bring some quiet solace. If this Christmas is a hard one, perhaps there is one special Christmas past that you hold close on this day. One such door that opened up for me within, this year, is the one to my tenth Christmas. Now by that time, my little sister and I, we knew Christmas. We were used to the patterns of the season. We'd decorate the house, garlands and lights. We'd set up the crèche. (Nothing like ours, but still a delight.) We'd make our list for Santa. We'd sit on his lap at the mall, even.

We'd diligently count down the days till Christmas with our Advent Calendar, opening every illustrated panel, day by day. And there was a treat behind every door. We'd be a sheep or an angel for the pageant. And most of all, we'd agonize and we'd pine for Christmas morning and the gifts to come.

But my tenth Christmas was different, the one that would change everything! This was the Christmas that my mom had twins. So the run up to Christmas was so much more than getting ready for the coming of Santa's gifts. We were getting ready for two gifts from God. My sister and I, we cherished the grainy picture from the sonogram which showed us the ghostly figures of the new members of our family. And so we prepared and waited. We watched Mom grow. We moved the two cribs into their room. And just before Christmas, Mom brought them home. And the image of Christmas morning that came to me this year was the marvel of being able to hold these tiny baby persons, both asleep, one crooked in each arm.

It was as if the theme of the Creche and the wonder of the Birth of the Holy Child was now made real in our family, a double helping even. I don't remember what Santa gave us, but I do remember what God gave us that Christmas.

Babies are adorable, yes. There is always this initial rush in endorphins at the sight of them. But, they are, at least for the family that gives them a home, demanding. They demand all of your attention and protection. And they make a mess, multiple times a day, that you must clean up. And, even as you try your best, they scream at you, or near you, I should say. When a baby comes, in the flesh, it is not just about a feeling, it is our lives, our history, which is forever altered, forever derailed, or should I say re-railed on to a new track. One of great struggle, and one of great joy.

Today, we are celebrating a birth that brought great changes and great joy for, not only one family, but for the entire world. It was a birth, at first hidden and obscure, that would leave no corner of the planet untouched by its glad tidings, good news that would ultimately unleash a Spirit that has been born again and again in generations upon generations of human hearts: this is the birth of Jesus, in a cave, born of his mother, Mary.

So much has been written, said, sung, and done as a result of this birth. One sermon can barely grasp it. It takes the church an entire year of services to reveal only a glimpse of the significance of this birth. It takes Christians entire lifetimes to grapple with what God has given them on this birthday. And what we've found is that this birthday is where everything changes, and for the better. And if you let this child into your home, if you let him, let's say, be born in you, everything will change, and for the better.

You've heard the phrase, "Let's keep it real." Well, this is the day that God got real with us. Joining us in our mess and making it holy with his presence, a presence that, even in the muck and the mire, never stopped showing forth the full-fledged love of God. And what this baby would do and say, it wouldn't be anything new. As John sings in our Gospel, this Word of God, this Child of God, has been with us since the beginning of time. Like a curtain being moved aside to reveal the sun, the birth of this baby would reveal something that had been there all along. Before that point, everyone had only talked about moving the curtain, and maybe they only opened the curtain a little bit, and then closed it again when it got too bright.

But this baby is going to tear the curtain off the window, showing us what God is really like, showing us the captivating light of the truth of God that enlightens all that had come before, and will inspire all that will come to be.

It's not just about today, though. Today is good, even great, but it is also a doorway into so much more. My prayer is that you will stick with it and learn all about what this baby is going to do, and what this baby is still doing in our world, and what this baby brings to the table for all of us. I don't want to spoil it, but this baby will grow up and pull heaven down from the sky and start the steady work of bringing it to earth.

But, as John sings, the world is going to reject him, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." People have such interests, and these are deeply vested interests, in keeping God up in heaven, out of their way, so they can do as they like, no matter what. And so they would, ultimately, throw Jesus back to heaven, back where he came from. But he will not stay there! So many people wanted to put the curtain back up so that the sun wouldn't shine so brightly on their comfortable darkness, so that they wouldn't have to wake up, they keep trying to nail the curtain back up, lying and cheating, and even shedding blood of their sister and brothers, to cover the light, and undo what this baby did. But the curtain is torn to ribbons. New territory has been revealed. With wide open spaces. And just like these Americas, you can't undiscover the New World. It's done.

John sings on: what came into being in this baby was true life, and the life was the light of all people, and the light that shines in the darkness is not overcome. God has become flesh and has lived among us, and we

have seen his glory, not the glory of a king or a president or a dictator, not the glory of a billionaire, not the glory of a life protected from the storms of this world, no. These glories are illusions. When the light of God shines forth, we can see how ephemeral these glories are. Like dust.

Instead, in Christ, we have seen in this baby the glory of God that comes as it does in a parent's love for their only child. The whole world is there. Delicate and precious. In that kind of love, there is something there that is worth giving everything away for, worth giving your life for. This is true glory. This baby, this Holy One, is going to show us the kind of glorious things where if you empty your life into them, you are not spent or ruined, but more comes back to you, a hundred fold, a thousand fold, full of grace and truth, love and mercy.

Christmas is just beginning. And I hope that the birth of this baby changes everything for you, that this baby throws you off your tracks, leading you into the New World, the Real World. It wouldn't be so bad, but it would be so different. It sounds beyond belief that one person can change the world, get it back on track, but trust me. Keep tabs on this baby this coming year. Watch and learn. See what he does in the world to change it forever. See how the world marvels and rejoices. See how the world tries to stamp out his light. But see how that light is not overcome by the darkness. The light shines in all of his friends, and beyond. In fact, the light of this child now suffuses all of Creation, as it always has. His light suffuses you, as well, it always has.

But for that divine light to matter, at all, it has to become matter. It has to be born. Born in Bethlehem. Then born in the Church, imperfect, but beautiful all the same. Then born in your beating and battered heart. Sparking a light that not only shines upon you but shines from you, revealing in the darkness of this world what you have always been: a beloved child of God.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.