



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

---

THE VERY REV. STEVEN L. THOMASON, DEAN AND RECTOR  
THE FEAST OF THE INCARNATION, CHRISTMAS EVE, DECEMBER 24, 2022  
ISAIAH 62: 6-12; PSALM 97; TITUS 3:4-7; LUKE 1:39-55

## TAKING PART IN THE PAGEANTRY OF CHRISTMAS

**Luke 2:1-20** *[In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see -- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.]*

Merry Christmas!

The vagaries of winter weather earlier this week prompted us to postpone the Christmas

Pageant until January 6<sup>th</sup>. While that may seem odd to some, since commercial Christmas will have already given way to

Valentine's Day displays in the stores, January 6<sup>th</sup> is actually quite fitting for the work of wrapping up our Christmas celebration, and there is nothing quite like the ebullient joy of a pageant to sing and set our hearts aright to the beautiful hope born in Christmas.

As you know, there are twelve days to the Christmas Season, and we are invited to revel in the feast for nigh on a fortnight which then, on January 6<sup>th</sup>, yields to the Magi, aka the Wise Men, aka the three kings, visiting the infant Jesus in Bethlehem, guided by a star. Presumably Jesus is still swaddled in his manger bed when the procession of these foreign dignitaries come-a-calling.

In our version of the Pageant here, the Procession of the Magi is the grand centerpiece of action, with three ranks of banner-waving, vestment-wearing, gift-bearing kids of all ages making their way down the aisles of this cathedral while singing their song of expectant praise, and some riding carts as stand-in for camels. We forego live camels here, in case you didn't know.

But it is a sight to see, and Friday January 6<sup>th</sup> at 7pm is the occasion to see it. There is a point to my telling you all this here tonight...

In the pageant, the children bring gifts to present on the altar here, symbolic of the gold, frankincense and myrrh which by tradition were brought to Jesus during that first Christmas season.

The presents we bring in our version are actually relics of the cathedral—items that bear special meaning and value beyond whatever price tag might be applied to them.

So, for example, the children bring a sterling silver offertory plate given to Saint Mark's in 1909 by a Civil War veteran who became Seattle's postmaster. We bring our offerings tonight in much the same way.

A brass vase is brought forward, symbolizing the gift of gold. The vase was given a century ago in memory of Hugh Roscoe Rood who was in England when called back to Seattle urgently, so he booked a ticket on the inaugural voyage of the SS Titanic. He was last seen assisting others into lifeboats. His funeral, without body, was held at St. Mark's two months later, in June 2012.

We still use these vases for flowers adorning our worship spaces, and through them we are tethered to the stories of our forebears in the procession of the faithful that has formed across generations in lockstep purpose to sing our praises to God in this place.

The children also present an incense thurible, acquired in 2002 in St. Petersburg, Russia, during a pilgrimage made by many in this community. A thurible burns frankincense like we use this evening in this service, designed to lift our senses to the presence of divine mystery in our midst.

A ceremonial silver trowel with precious gems is also brought out for the annual pageantry. Originally used in the rite of laying this cathedral's cornerstone in 1928, it was a gift from Joshua and Laura Green, who are buried in the Chapel of the Resurrection in the crypt beneath our feet. The cornerstone serves as reminder that we are part of something larger here, with Christ as our cornerstone, and we gather to be nourished by bread and wine in mystical connection to be the Body of Christ in the world.

All that we do here tonight is in service to the proposition that God has come to dwell among us so that we might have life and have it abundantly, to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. The gift of Christmas is our incarnational way of enacting that beautiful truth.

Friends, we come to hear a delightful story tonight, but if we confine Christmas to a stable in ancient Palestine, and leave it there,

detached from any real sense of our participation in the story here and now, we will miss the full power of that story and its bearing on our lives.

Similarly, if we list too far into the orbit of doctrine—that Christmas is just the Church's way of explaining the mystery of God's presence in the world, the spiritual force behind all creation, then we risk constraining the mystery of that great gift in a way that renders it less immanent and alive.

Christmas can be both—a quaint story and a sacred doctrine, but it becomes much more when it comes alive—when we queue the Christmas procession in our lives, bringing the gifts that help us know our place in God's eternal story of hope and healing for all creation.

We gather tonight to lay claim to our part in the story that is unfolding even here, even now.

Christmas is the occasion for us to have a “hands on” relationship with God who claims this world as worthy, and all of us as beloved. With that gift presented to us once more this night, we are invited to revel in the experience of Christmas, to take our places in the procession of joy and glad tidings, that unto us a child is born.

We go about this liturgical work incarnationally, and with abandon, because that is the only way it makes sense. We are children of God who have been given permission to unleash the creative spirit in us, to discover what truth lies in us, to experience it and then express it in a world that desperately needs to hear the good news we have to share.

So let your life be changed by this Christmas gift! Live this next year by the light of its hope in your life. Join the procession that declares God is up to something here and now. Love as if Christ has been born in your heart, because Christ has, my friends. And that is good news indeed!



SAINT MARK'S  
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL