

CHRISTMAS 2015

First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-6 *They name him Prince of Peace* [From Mass during the Night]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 96 "Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord" [Night]

Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14; 3:3-7 *He saved us because of his mercy* [Combined readings from Night& Dawn]

Alleluia Verse: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom God's favor rests" [Dawn]

Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25 They shall call him Emmanuel, God with us. [From the Vigil Mass]

You probably know the 1st verse of *Hark the Herald Angels*, but the 2nd verse goes like this

♪ *Christ by highest heav'n adored, Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold him come, offspring of a Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as one of us to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."* ♪

We are celebrating the birthday of Jesus today,
but he has many other names in the carols we sing and the Scriptures we read.

There are at least 6 in that verse of *Hark the Herald Angels*. Can you name them:
[**Christ, Lord, God, King, Jesus, Emmanuel,**]

And there are 5 more in the first reading. **Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-forever, Prince of Peace**. They sound like a bunch of superheroes, but the last one is more like the Jesus who actually lived among us - **Prince of Peace**. That name is one that he took for himself and it describes the Jesus we really need in our world as 2015 comes to a close.

Three of those 11 names are repeated in the Gospel for tonight.

Jesus - the name the angel told Joseph to give to the child, a name which means "Yahweh is salvation" (in Jewish tradition, it is still the father that gives a child its name - Matthew wanted to emphasize that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises to Israel).

Christ - the Greek form of the Hebrew word, **Messiah**.

And finally, **Emmanuel** which appears in a quotation from the prophet Isaiah (Is. 7:14). A name that the Gospel translates as "**God is with us.**"

There is a great story about that name that Sr. Anna and I really like.

It goes something like this:

There was a community of monks who were getting old and were very sad. They were just going through the motions when they prayed and worked. One day the Abbot - their leader - met with a friend of his who was a Jewish Rabbi. The Rabbi had a hut on the monastery grounds where he sometimes came to pray.

They prayed together and read the Bible together and even cried together because they felt sad. They were sad because of the pain & conflict in the world and even in the monks' community. Finally, the Rabbi gave the Abbot a teaching - it was just one sentence:

"The Messiah is among you."

*The Abbot left his friend & called the whole community of monks together and told them what the Rabbi had said, but he used different words. This is what he told his brothers,
“The rabbi said that one of us is the Messiah.”*

They were blown away by this and began to wonder who the Messiah might be. Could it really be one of them? They never got a clear answer, and they had been told not to repeat the teaching, but they began to change.

*They treated each other with a very special reverence. They lived with one another as if they had finally **found** something. But they prayed together as people who were always **looking** for something. They prayed with more attention and peace, and lived with more joy and love. And the people who came to pray with them were inspired to spread peace, joy and love to their families and to the world. Some of them even asked to join the monastery.*

When the Rabbi says: “The Messiah is among you,” he is recalling the words of the Jewish prophet, Isaiah - words which are quoted by the angel in the Gospel passage for today -
They shall call him Emmanuel, God with us.

But the Abbot says the same thing in a different way, “One of us is the Messiah.”

The Rabbi is speaking from the Old Testament, the old Covenant between God & the people of Israel.

The Abbot interprets his words in the light of the birth of Christ.

We are praying for the same thing to happen to us when we sing the song:

♪ *O Come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel.
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appears.* ♪

We are called to believe so deeply that The Messiah is among us
that we can SEE Christ in each other, and BE Christ for each other.

When we see each other as children of one God, the one we call OUR Father;
When we stand up for someone who is being oppressed;
when we care for the sick, we are seeing, supporting & caring for **Christ among us**.

When we welcome the stranger fleeing from oppression, hunger and war,
the way so many women, children and men are escaping from Syria, Mexico and Iraq in our time,
we are welcoming **Christ**.

When we serve the poor & imprisoned and listen to persons who are different from us,
even those we are afraid of, we are serving **Christ** and respecting his dignity.

The message of Christmas is on my otter's tee-shirt - this is my first preaching puppet, and I may have brought him here with me before, but the message on his shirt is worth repeating:

I Love ❤️ my human.

That means Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists & so on,
People whose skin is brown, black, white & any shade in between.

Women and men who speak English, Spanish, French, Italian, Arabic, Hebrew or Swahili.

Men, women & children before they are born, who are just beginning to walk,

Who are gay and straight or who are about to die.

There is another carol we hear around Christmas - *Away in a manger*.

As we celebrate the Eucharist tonight, we remember that Jesus was born in a stable
& laid on some straw in a manger - the place where animals were fed.

St. Francis of Assisi had a Mass celebrated in a cave which was used as a stable, on a mountain in a village named Greccio in Italy. He did it in the midst of live animals - like a donkey, a sheep, a goat & a cow.

This event made the Christmas stable scene wildly popular throughout the world.

Francis had a board placed over the manger to celebrate the Eucharist- because Jesus was to become our food, our living bread,
just like the manger was filled with the food the animals needed to live.

Today we will find Jesus present for us on the altar, the place where **we** come to be fed with the body and life-blood of Jesus.

And when we eat this bread and drink this cup, we are given the power to become what we eat.

That is what Christmas is all about - getting to know Jesus so well
that we can see him in each other and be his presence for the world.

I want to sing one final verse of a familiar carol as my prayer for Christmas.

♪ O holy Child of Bethlehem! Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide in us, Our Lord Emmanuel! ♪

