

ANNOUNCEMENTS / CONGREGATIONAL CONCERN / DECEMBER 27, 1981

VISITORS We greet the visitors who have joined us this morning in worship. We're delighted to have you with us, and hope the opportunity will be ours to greet you in a more personal way before you depart.

Join us downstairs in the CR following the service where tea and coffee will be served. Share your name and address with us by signing one of the Guest Books. Join us on other Sundays in worship and in fellowship.

LAST SUNDAY OF THE YEAR Today is the last Sunday of the year. As Christians, we come to this day secure in the faith that the past rests in the forgiving hands of God, and we face the future in the complete trust and wonderful confidence that His love and light will be sufficient for every step of the way in a New Year.

I feel it's a bit premature to be wishing you a Happy New Year, but some we will not see after today until next Sunday. May each of you have many, many wonderful blessings to count in the coming year.

Next Sunday, the first Sunday of 1982, we shall celebrate Holy Communion, and this we shall do at the Altar of our Church and not in the pews. Indeed, that is a good place to begin a New Year - kneeling at the altar of one's Church.

CONCERNS Please note the word of appreciation conveyed to those who have responded so generously to the Christmas appeal of the Church. Christmas gifts are still being received and will probably continue to flow into the office for another week or so - for which we are grateful.

Note that the canvass continues; we need to secure another 10 pledges and 3,000 before we can feel the job is done. Perhaps you can help. Note, too, that the 1982 boxes of offering envelopes are being distributed again today downstairs in the rear of the CR. Pick up the box that has your name and save the Church the postage expense. (218 / \$81,500)

Notes and articles for the January issue of "A Word in Edgeways" should be into the office by Tuesday of this week in order to make the next issue.

OFFERING Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive". In this spirit, let us worship God with our morning offering.

December 27, 1981

INTRODUCTION

Holy Season,

Resting as we do on this Sunday after Christmas - renewed and refreshed by the "glad tidings" of this

And by the love and the warmth of the magic and mystery of these days, let us remember how the shepherds "returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen!"....

In the moments of silence into which we now enter, let us confirm in our hearts their joyous manner of departure from Bethlehem's manger.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill to men..."

"And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, the Wise Men departed to their country by another way."

As we prepare to return to the tasks of another week in our everyday world, may we, too, return by another way - the way of peace and goodwill, the way of love and understanding.

Because....we, too, like the Wise Men and the Shepherds of old have knelt before the Manger of Bethlehem, richly blessed by all we have seen and heard.

LORD'S PRAYER

O Thou, who hearest prayer, hear our prayers - for others as well as for ourselves, now being spoken in the privacy of our lives, spoken in the name and the Spirit of Jesus, Lord, who taught us to say when we pray,

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen"

"Are you willing" Henry Van Dyke once asked, "to believe that love is the strongest force in the world - stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death, and that the Blessed Life which began in Bethlehem 1900 hundred years ago is the image and the brightness of Eternal Love? Then you can keep Christmas! And if you can keep it for a day, then why not always?"

Keeping Christmas all year long. This is what makes "for peace on earth and goodwill toward men". It was not made to be put away. May we, too, go home a different way because like the Wise Men of old, we too have brushed up against Eternal Truth this Christmas. A different way. Different persons.

PRAYER As the Christmas Season slowly passes once again, O God, may the light of it linger on in our lives. May we see the world and those in it in a new way and from a different perspective. Remind us that Christmas is not made to be put away in boxes, but lived out in faith and in trust, in hope and in love, with courage and compassion in the coming days of a New Year. Amen

"Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find.
Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you".

"Do not worry about your life...fretting as to what kind of food you are going to eat, or about your body as to what clothes you will wear. Your life is more important than what you wear."

"Will worry help you to add a single hour to your life?"

"The one who tries to preserve his own self will lose his soul, but he who loses himself in the cause of the Gospel will find the higher life".

"Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever desires to have a chief place among you must minister to everyone".

"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul".

"If anyone forces you to go a mile with him, go two miles"

"Whatever you would like to have others do for you, do it for them..."

"One of the scribes came and asked Him, 'What commandment is chief of all?' And Jesus replied, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself!'"

"If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, and you would say to thi mountain, 'Move away from here' ~~and~~ it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you"!

"Come unto me all you who toil and bear heavy burdens, and I will give you rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light".

"You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt itself loses its flavor, wherewith can its strength be restored. It is good for nothing, but to be thrown away".

"You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine that men may see your good works".

HOME A DIFFERENT WAY

We read that the Wise Men went home a different way. And surely they also went home different persons, too, for they had had an encounter with a new life, a new power, a new forces - the power of Divine Love. It had come their way and touched their lives. It was a love that nothing - note even death - can separate us from.

can give my daddy something, make him like he used to be. Make him smoke his pipe and tell me stories again.

I heard him say to Mummie that only Eternity could cure him. Santa: could you please bring my daddy some Eternity?"

HOME BY A DIFFERENT WAY

The last verse of today's scripture lesson reminds us that we need not wait a whole year. The Wise Men followed a star, They had made their way to the manger and had left their gifts, then in a dream, they sensed that they were not to go back to Herod in Jerusalem, but to return home a different way.

For us, this can mean that they went home different persons because something unique had happened to them. For them, "The word had become flesh and dwelt among them".

They had been exposedd to Eternal Truth.

And before we move away from the warm glow of this Holy Season, before we leave, perhaps we, too, can change and go home by a different way. For it was the Christ Child who grew into manhood and went on to leave with us the faith, the hope, the wisdom - yes, something of Eternity - that has changed the lives of people and the life of our world.

HIS WORDS

Let me share with you some of His thoughts and words that each of us in our own way may begin to plot a new direction and to go home by a different way because of His life and His coming.

Listen again - as if you were hearing these words for the very first time, words that have touched the hearts of millions across twenty centuries.

"Blessed are those of you who mourn, for you shall experience a comforting Presence"

"Happy are you when men insult you and mistreat you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers. Be glad and leap for joy for your Heavenly Father will reward you greatly".

"Love your enemies. Do a kindness for those who hate you. Say a prayer for those who a buse you".

"Do not pass judgement on another, and then they will not pass judgement on you - for the measure you use in dealing with others will be the measure that will be used toward you".

"Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, and do not notice the beam in your own eye?"

"How often am I to forgive my brother? Seventy times seven!"

BEAUTY Then again, Christmas is beauty - the beauty of bright and shining decorations or red and green, silver and gold, the lovely greeting cards and Christmas trees. It's the beauty of voices singing the familiar carols, the beauty of a church choir carrying us across the centuries as we are lifted by melodies out of all low thoughts and are taken up to the higher grounds of hope and faith and love.

OUT. It's sitting in Carnegie Hall and hearing Handel's Messiah. It's going to Riverside Church on the Sunday before Christmas and sharing in the Service of Carols.

GIVING Christmas is beauty and it is also giving - thinking of others, plotting to surprise loved ones and friends. It's remembering someone else who has no one to think about him - the unexpected visit, the card, the letter, the special remembrance. At Christmas - for a few days - we lose our old selves and we discover that there is real joy to be found in helping others to a little happiness.

REMEMBERING Christmas is also a memory time. It is a time when we recall the best, ~~and unfortunately, also the worst~~ of life. The joyful ~~and the not so joyful~~ memories flood our minds as the past is transformed by time into a soft, radiant glow - like the shining of a church full of flickering candles on Christmas Eve.

Friendships from the past are renewed once again as cards and letters and greetings come from friends now living in distant places.

Yes, Christmas is a time when we pause and recall how many blessings we have had, and we are aware that at no time in all of our lives have we been completely alone. We may have tuned ourselves out, but God through the Christ spirit has always been there. Christmas is a memory time.

LOVING And Christmas is a time of loving. It is a time for stopping to listen to others - not to just what they say, but to what they want to say, but don't know how to - listening to their feelings. It is caring enough to say thoughtful words.

It is loving enough to be there....and to say nothing. It is sensitivity. It is empathy. It is concern....openness....acceptance....positive interest.

ALL THIS AND MORE Christmas is all this and much more. And how sad it will be if we must wait for a whole year to experience the wonder, the warmth and the surprise of this incredible time - the beauty, the giving, the remembering, the loving and caring.

A true story comes from the Post Office which hardly has opportunity to breathe at this time of year. Bennett Cerf tells of this incident in his book, The Sound of Laughter. An employee who handled the dead letter mail had lost a small son and was unable to recover his emotional stability. He had become withdrawn and uncommunicative. Then, at Christmas time, there came to him a letter to Santa Claus from his little daughter. The letter read,

"Dear Santa: We are very sad at our house this year. My little brother went to Heaven last Spring. I don't want anything, but please take my brother some toys. If you

"HOME BY A DIFFERENT WAY"

INTRODUCTION It was the day after Christmas and a child playing with his new toys was heard to say, "Gee...now we have to wait a whole year for another Christmas!" Many adults have something of the same feeling.

How true this is for most of us. Within a few days the great pageant will be drawing to a close. A week from tomorrow and we'll be back to our regular schedules ~~and normal patterns of living~~. Soon we'll be taking down the tree that we only just put up; we'll sort out and store away the lights and the ornaments for another year. We'll make arrangements to exchange the gifts that do not fit. Some will be tempted to say "Thank God it's all over for another year....for Christmas can be so exhausting!" Others will feel like saying, "Oh, if only the spirit of Christmas could continue for a few weeks...what a difference it would make!"

I've always been fond of those lines that Carlyle wrote to a friend:

"I do not like to take down the Christmas tree. Not because it is a drudgery to wrap the ornaments or sweep the needles that blur into the carpet pattern. I can do all that needs doing in the course of all the other things a house requires. But the spot where the tree has stood seems empty as though it wanted something it had had and lost. No chair can fill the place where the tree was. No end table. No magazine rack. Trees are living things, and when adopted into the family at Christmas embrace so much more than colored lights and shining balls and tantalizing wrap of presents. Maybe what I mean to say is: Christmas was not made to be put away."

To me, that's a lovely line - "Christmas was not made to be put away". How sad it is if we must now wait for a whole year for another Christmas - for Christmas stirs our hearts as no other religious observance does.

What is it about Christmas that touches us so deeply?

WONDER / SURPRISE In a way, Christmas has a magic all of its own. Year after year, it invades our lives...overpowering us often against our will. It overcomes the crowds, lifts us above and beyond the "jingle bells" of commercialism and touches something deep and sacred within us.

Christmas is the wonder, the surprise, the pure joy of childhood. It's the child-Jesus brought to mind each year in the pageantry of the poetry of the star, of the shepherds, of the wise men as they gathered around Mary and Joseph and the new born baby.

At Christmas for a brief time we all become like children - recalling again for a little while the joy and the excitement with our brothers and sisters and other children. It's recalling the laughter and the warmth and the memories symbolized by decorations, retrieving, for instance, that old bent star to be placed on top of the tree. ~~For some here in the city, it's going back home for a few days and reliving happy times with parents and grandparents. For others, it's visiting with friends and sharing with others the joy of Christmas - for Christmas is the wonder, the surprise and pure joy of childhood. It has a magic all of its own and it seems to bring out the best in each of us.~~