

SERMON FOR YEAR C, CHRISTMAS EVE (NATIVITY OF OUR LORD)

LUKE 2:1-20

BY TOREY LIGHTCAP

SAINT THOMAS' EPISCOPAL CHURCH

DECEMBER 24, 2009

"WELCOME"

*Welcome, welcome, welcome.*

To you who have polished these pews with your prayers these many years –

The membership roll, stalwarts and holdouts: Hello.

To you who doubt and pine and wonder where to place your pain on a night like this,

Welcome.

To you who look up at a sky choked with snow and see beyond it to the stars,

Because you just can't help but be happy, it's just in your bones:

Hello, and Welcome.

To those who've come, though they don't know *why* ... Hello, and Welcome.

To everyone hog-tied and dragged in through the door, Welcome.

To those bound to tradition, or, perhaps more precisely,

The tradition of your ancestors – ideas that may now seem like such a dim prospect:

Hello, and know that you, too, are always, always welcome.

To those who seek mystery or certitude, or just a better question in life to be about:

Welcome.

To young and old and middle-aged:

Whatever your beliefs, whatever your heart tells you is right:

To every *last* one here,

And to those of us with the gall to imagine we should ever go *first*:

Without apology, and without exception – Welcome this holy night.

As the sun leaves us and the wind locks us in this house for a little while,

We join together tonight to take our turn in the turning world

Gazing into something which is both physical and real,

And beyond our capacity to describe.

It is, in one sense, a very great scandal that God should choose

A little boy – a *baby!* – in some cave somewhere – in which to be seen,

In a time and in a place to which we can point on a map or a calendar.

It's as outrageous as it is sublime.

The stink and spittle of animals; the blood of birth; dirt floors, uncertainty, terrible humility.

We live in an age in which it seems that God is, whatever God is to you –

You get to describe God, and no one, it would appear, can argue with you.

Except that this child is now before us:

A specific, tangible, incarnate, particular Thing,

With a pulse and a need for food and the bond of his mother.

And we gather and we watch, and we say to him, in terrible humility:

*Welcome, O Child of God.*

I'd like to ask you to do something that may just be slightly embarrassing.  
Turn to someone – someone you know, someone you don't, doesn't matter –  
And say to him or her, *Welcome, O Child of God.*

What does that feel like?  
A little silly, maybe? A bit of formal grandiosity on such a cold night?

Maybe it doesn't comport too well with Midwestern values  
To look into the eyes of another and suggest, on Christmas Eve no less,  
That he or she is a Child of God.  
(I've only lived here a little while; you'll have to forgive me.)  
However – and I say this with every ounce of sincerity befitting this pulpit –  
*It is a fact ...*

You are the icon through which God sees the world.  
You are the hope of the world.  
You are loved unconditionally, with every last flaw,  
As a Child of God living in a world that may or may not have taught you love.

It's a fact.  
You couldn't change it if you wanted to.  
That love will never break, never outdistance you.  
You are the emblem of the Most High.  
And if this Child we celebrate – the Living Lord Jesus – is anything,  
He is the token of that fact.  
He is the articulation of that love,  
The speaking-forth of that Word that gives breath to all living things.

He will live and die as one of us, reconciling the world to himself.  
He will teach the masters and eat with the lowest of the low.  
He will place his hands in the most scandalous of places to heal the infirmities of his day.  
He will challenge and build up and restore and break down.  
He will be whispered over and betrayed.  
He will descend into death in terrible humility, and ascend in even greater humility.

He is the token, the Son of God who lives to demonstrate that we are Children of God.  
He is unbreakable love, broken out over us.  
His hand is upon you; his birth a reminder of what always was, what always will be.

Can't quite get your head around it? Welcome. I stand with you.

So we say to him, *Welcome, O Child of God.*  
And we say to one another, *Welcome, O Child of God.*

We totter on the edge of deep mystery on a wintry night.  
Don't try to explain it; just ... enjoy it.

Come, let us adore him.