

Christmas
December 25, 2021
The Reverend Dr. Brent Was

Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!

Christmas morning. You are at Church. You are doing what you are supposed to be doing, putting Jesus Christ firmly in the center of the day. Your Christmas roast will be that much more tender, your wines finer, your pies sweeter with a start to your day like this, Christmas morning, at church with the Prologue to St. John's gospel ringing in our ears.

The Prologue of St. John's gospel isn't what comes to most of our minds when we think of Christmas. It is pretty dense, pretty demanding, challenges the imagination. It has been another hard year, and we are in a complicated moment in the pandemic, our political situation remains precarious, inflation threatens, the climate, as ever, looms... I don't know that we want to get into something as deep as the Prologue. But then again, I don't know if Jesus was what anyone wanted for Christmas, either. This is my perennial Christmas sermon, and it is one that we need right now, more than ever.

Years ago, someone passed on to me a fantastic newspaper column by Dorcas Smucker. She is a skillful writer coming out of the rather larger Mennonite community in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. In this particular Christmas column, Mrs. Smucker admitted that she often gives people presents that she thinks they should want, not so much what they might actually want. She reflected that maybe that was what God did in giving us Jesus Christ.

She wrote, "Everyone was waiting for him, the Bible says, but they all wanted him to fit their own wish list. Many wanted him to free the country from political oppression. Some wanted a religious leader, obviously one that

fit their own strict agenda. Most, I think, just wanted him to satisfy all their wants and make everything all better.

“Instead... he told them to keep paying tribute to Caesar, an obligation everyone hated. He told soldiers to be content with their wages and to ‘do violence to no man.’ How was that supposed to work? He broke the rules. He hung out with the wrong crowd and called the pious people a bunch of snakes. He told people to love their enemies. He embarrassed his family. What a disappointment.”

Is this what we really want for Christmas? A light that shines in the darkness, a light that will eventually shine on the cross? What about the sugar plums, eggnog, and Christmas trees hedged in on all sides with the abundance of the season?

There are not many easy paths in Christianity, not according to Jesus. Being visited by an angel, conceiving by the Holy Spirit: not easy paths. Being born on a barn floor is not the easy path. Turning the other cheek, preaching the truth in love to the principalities and powers of the world are not the easy paths. The cross is not the easy path. What Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh offers us is not easy... simple, perhaps, but about the least easy thing I can imagine. We are called each and every moment to love God with all our hearts and all our minds, with all our souls and all our bodies and to love your neighbor as ourselves. The way of Christ is not the easy way, but when we set out on that path, when we follow Jesus Christ, when we try to follow Jesus, what we are doing is making alive the Word in *our* flesh, right here, right now, to the glory of God and for the love of each other.

The love and abundance of Jesus Christ is manifest in our hearts and minds as we sing to the Lord a new song that we remember each and every year. This is the wild and wonderful mystery of Christmas. This is the glory of God

living among us, even, no, especially in a year like this. It is not always what we want, but it is exactly what we and the whole world needs exactly in a year like this. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” Merry Christmas, everyone. AMEN