

Christmas Morning - Year A

- Isaiah 52:7-10
- Hebrews 1:1-4,(5-12)
- John 1:1-14
- Psalm 98

Collect for Christmas III: *Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born [this day] of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.*

Good morning. Merry Christmas! Feliz Navidad! God Jul! Joyeux Noel!

There are so many ways to say Merry Christmas in so many languages.

What is the language of God? This (point to Nativity set) ... this is the language of love.

If you were here last night, you heard the story we all know so well. The story of Mary and Joseph; royal decrees, people scrambling around the Middle East so they could change from being undocumented migrants to becoming fully documented tax payers; shepherds in the fields watching the flocks by night; angels dropping in making bold announcements; all the local hotels and motels booked up; smelly barns and feeding troughs.

I saw a cartoon the other day where a cow is standing next to a manger with a little golden halo hovering over it, and the cow says, “Hey waiter, there’s a son of god in my food!”

Christmas is so rich and full of imagery. Layer and layer of story upon story. You don't hardly know how or where to unwrap it. I have to admit, wrapping has become a lost art in our house.

When I was growing up, my mother was a master gift-wrapper. You could tell she spent hours cutting all the paper just right, neatly folded corners, ribbons wrapped this way and that way as if they had been wrapped by Leonardo DaVinci or Michelangelo. Bows. None of those store-bought bows. Bows made by hand, lovingly crafted, those little streamers curling down ever so elegantly.

The wrapping was more of a gift than what was inside those boxes. But come Christmas morning, four kids and a Swede tore into those gifts like an E-5 tornado through a trailer park. The hours of wrapping reduced to rubble in a matter of minutes. Now THAT was a wonder to behold!

Nowadays, I confess I inherited none of my mother's gift-wrapping skills, or care. Hey, it's Christmas. It's a day to be honest. Gifts go into store-bought gift-bags (used and reused until they're just too torn and tattered to really hold or hide their contents).

When I do wrap, I use an obscene amount of paper and tape to get the job done. I've got spools of ribbon in our little wrapping paper storage bag that must go back to the Truman or Eisenhower Administrations – that's how seldom I use ribbons. I do usually go to the trouble of adding store bought bows, though – it's the thought that counts.

That sure sounds like a cop-out, doesn't it?

No, what's outside may not look like much. At least I don't use duct tape – or at least not as of yet – but it's what's inside the package that counts. My goal is always to find gifts that will please the recipient. I suspect that's what we all do, isn't it?

Christmas is like the story from Luke. It's earthy; it's messy; it's smelly; it's dangerous; it's uncomfortable, like nine-months-pregnant Mary climbing up onto a donkey to travel 70 miles so Joseph can register for the joy of paying Roman taxes. Oh, Joy to the world ... Bah, humbug!

But that was last night. Last night we got the typical, noisy, messy, chaotic Christmas Story we all know and love. While the world has been singing Christmas carols since before Halloween, we've spent the past four weeks working through those more somber, less familiar Advent tunes we hardly ever hear or know how to sing. And that's OK.

Advent is the wrapping paper on the gift that is Christmas. Yesterday we came together and finally got to sing the songs we know; we got to see the church lit up and spruced up; all the candles lit up, including the Christ candle; the tree standing there pointing skyward, towards heaven. The poinsettias with their red and pink flowers – which aren't really flowers – they're called "bracts" – but there they are, brightening up the sanctuary with that outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace of God – signs of life in the dead of winter.

Today, the gift has been unwrapped. Today, John shows us what's inside the advent package that got unwrapped last night by Rilla and the crowd that gathered here in the candle-lit church.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word WAS God!

Today, the crowd is smaller; the setting is more intimate; the atmosphere more serene. There is still lots of day left. I suspect we still have things to do, places to go, family and friends with whom to break bread, share laughs and memories, tell

stories, maybe sit and notice empty chairs, reminding us of saints who are no longer with us.

But that's life; that's love. God enters in, not as a stranger, but as a Word: a word dwelling in our hearts as we make space for the Word to be born within us.

As the dust settles from the chaos of last night, the manger, shepherds, long travel, John invites we (who are also "dust") to take our seats and rest a moment. Take a few moments to ponder the meaning behind the child who was born in Bethlehem all those many years ago.

Who was he? Who is he?

"The light of the world," says John. Nothing more. Nothing less.

When I get up in the morning, there's nothing that delights me more than throwing open the shades and letting daylight into the house. I enjoy the peace that often comes with darkness, but when the sun rises, I want to rise with it.

Jesus is the light of the world, and today we celebrate the WORD that has come into our world – as dark, dangerous, chaotic, and crazy as it can be – and John invites us to throw open the shades so that the Son of God (pun fully intended) may come into our lives so that we may better see who we are as the people of God.

There are so many ways to say Merry Christmas in so many languages.

"What is the language of God?" we asked at the beginning.

This (point to Nativity set) ... the language of God is love. O come let us adore him.
Amen.

Sermon delivered to the people of St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Mount Vernon, WA) 12/25/2025 by the Rev. Keith Axberg, Ret.