

12.14.2022 Advent Midweek Prayer, Week 3

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

1 Thessalonians; Psalm 96:1-6, 11-13; Galatians 4:4-7

“God is faithful”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

This year’s Advent midweek series is titled “Holy interruptions, Holy in-dwellings” reminding us that in the midst of all of the interruptions in our busy lives, God is always with us, dwelling in our humanity with grace, peace and hope.

As we get closer to the celebration of Christmas, the readings tonight also encourage us to hear again that God is faithful. Paul writes that God will sanctify us entirely, meaning that over our lifetimes, God continues to make us holy. In Holy Baptism, our sin is forgiven, and in Holy Communion we are continually strengthened and renewed so that over a lifetime, we grow in holiness. In the midst of the cultural Christmas season, we also need to hear that Christ was born to forgive us, welcoming us into God’s family as beloved children.

Indeed, Paul says it this way in Galatians, “*And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.*” At Christmas we hear again the good news that God so loves this world that God gives his Son, so that we too, might be adopted into God’s family as heirs and children.

The world makes much to do about the joy and the merriness of this time of the year, yet we often hear precious little about why we are supposed to be joyful and merry. Christ is born so that his Spirit might dwell in our hearts, as we also cry, “Abba! Father!” In God, we have a loving Father; in Jesus we have a brother and friend, who promises that his Spirit will always dwell in us. Advent and Christmas are really about declaring our identity and the truth about ourselves – we are heirs and children of God.

Psalm 96 reads, “*He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.*” Yet, how many people in this world also have an image of God as a wrathful judge, and an image of themselves as broken, or even unredeemable? Advent and Christmas are times to realize again the joy of being accepted for who we are as God’s beloved children. The mystery of the incarnation is that God desires to dwell in our lives, healing and filling our often empty and broken humanity with grace and truth.

The Christmas story is a reminder that God works through small and seemingly insignificant

people, such as an unknown couple named Joseph and Mary, giving them a Son named Jesus, born in a small and insignificant town named Bethlehem. God announced this birth not to kings or to elite religious leaders, but to shepherds under the cover of a nighttime sky. God's holy interruption into the lives of Joseph, Mary and the shepherds, filled their humanity with strength and hope. Joseph and Mary responded with faithfulness to their calling as Jesus' parents, encouraging him in faith. The shepherds also rejoiced, telling others the good news they had seen in Jesus. Small and insignificant people, humble and faithful people, became the messengers of God's in-dwelling in our shared humanity.

As God dwelled in them, so God also dwells in you through faith. This is the gift and mystery of Christmas. Like Joseph, Mary and the shepherds, our lives gain new meaning and identity as Christ dwells in us. We realize who we are: we are members of Jesus' family, sisters and brothers to Jesus, and sisters and brothers to one another. The Psalmist writes, "*He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth,*" meaning that God will not destroy us, rather, it is God's desire to judge by forgiving, restoring and sanctifying humanity as children of God.

The God who comes to us in Jesus is faithful. In Jesus, God reveals what our humanity is truly capable of. We are capable of carrying the infinite things of God. This is the message of Advent and Christmas, but we must quiet ourselves, like those shepherds under a nighttime sky, to sense the awesome thing that God is doing in each of us. God comes to judge the world, and God's judgment is Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. He is Emmanuel, God with us. God dwells in and works through our humanity.

As you think about your own life, what do you claim as your self-identity? What is the new song that God is singing through your life as you live on this earth? Like Mary, Joseph and the shepherds, what will your life be remembered for?

Just as God chose seemingly insignificant people, like Joseph, Mary and the shepherds, God has also chosen you. Christmas is a reminder that God chooses humanity. God has chosen you to be the means of God's grace in this world. This is the gift we celebrate at Christmas.

God is faithful. God dwells in you so that you might be a living sign of God's peace in this world.

After the decorations are put away, and the world moves on, Christ remains in this world, dwelling in you.

God will do great things in this world through you. Amen.