

“Born of God

Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12; John 1:1-18

January 4th, 2015

Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut

The Rev. Dr. Brian R. Bodt, Pastor

As the Christmas season nears its end, I want to extend a personal thank you to all of you for the kindnesses extended to our family and church staff. The cards and expressions of appreciation for the ministry we share are very gratifying. Your generous staff gift was, well, so generous! The gift of time with my father, brothers and their families in Maryland, as well as my own in Connecticut, is irreplaceable. And the treats in all their forms gives new meaning to the 70th anniversary of the “Battle of the Bulge.”

There were, however, a few things we did not receive. Tops among them—thankfully, I might add—were the ubiquitous Twelve Days of Christmas gifts. The others we did not receive purport to come from the Balmy Clergy Supply Catalog of Valdosta, Georgia.:

Late Entrance Alarm: Tired of people entering church after the opening hymn? A laser beam at each door sends out a piercing alarm each time the beam is broken, encouraging church members to arrive in a timely manner. Also discourages mid-worship bathroom breaks.

Stay-Lit Altar Candles: Just when we solved the problem of lighting the candles, these candles provide hours of fun as you watch acolytes attempt to extinguish these candles in vain.

Vacuum-Tube Alms Collection System: Operates like the ones at bank drive-ins. Pew mounted with central receiving station in basement. Eliminates the time-consuming offertory. Does not provide directions on where to place the choir anthem. Price includes pew installation.

And lest you think there is no relief for you, the congregation....

Robot Pastor: programmed to deliver any of 487 15 minute sermons. Built in sensors identify worshippers falling asleep and automatically shortens the message!

As the Christmas season ends tomorrow, we hear different versions of the birth narratives. If Luke's story—with angels, shepherds, friendly beasts and the Holy Family—is the snapshot, then Matthew's account is the family album. Jesus comes not just for Jews, but for Gentiles. Indeed, the old phrase is “Wise men (and women) still seek him.”

And John's account is the family tree. Jesus is the Word of God made human, yes. And equally important: *to all who received him...he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.* (John 1:12-13, ed.)

Born of God to be children of God. It captures our imagination, lifts those of faltering faith and challenges those of inadequate faith. Christmas is *not only* about the birth of a Jewish peasant to poor parents, *but also* about our family lineage. We are born from the God of heaven and earth, placed here for a reason and a season, and destined to grow up as children of God.

Here's the surprise: the plan was so exceptionally simple and unimaginative that most people missed him. The Creator became the created. The King of Kings came as an unhailed servant. The Mighty One arrived in simplicity and weakness. Because of this intervention of God, divinity is not only transcendent but immanent: it is *not only* lofty and far away *but also* close by, near at hand.

Sure, we face trials and tribulations. Who doesn't face hardships? Certainly not the Lord of Life. The Cross was in the crèche. But is that our final end? No, declares faith. Maybe we need to stop telling God how big our storm is and start telling our storm how big our God is.

Words of reflection by another, author unknown, says it well:

I asked God for patience. God said, “No.”
Patience is a byproduct of trials, earned not granted.

I asked God for happiness. God said, “No,
I give you blessings. Happiness is up to you.”

I asked God to spare me pain. God said, “No, there is no joy without sadness. Use your pain to draw close to me.”

I asked God to make my spirit grow. God said, “No. You must grow on your own, but I will prune you to make you fruitful.”

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life. God said, “No, I will give you life so that you may enjoy all things.”

I asked God to help me love others as much as God loves me. God said, “Ahhh, you have the idea.”

We have a lineage that is eternal. Or, to put it another way: your picture is on God’s refrigerator. Born of God to be children of God, thanks be to God.