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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

December 24, 2021

All Years, Christmas (I), Revised Common Lectionary

[Isaiah 9:2-7](#)

[Psalm 96](#)

[Titus 2:11-14](#)

[Luke 2:1-14\(15-20\)](#)

Lord, speak to us; and give us open hearts to listen. Amen.

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There's a Peanuts cartoon where Charlie Brown and friends are preparing for the Christmas pageant. As Peppermint Patty and her friend Marcie walk toward rehearsal, Peppermint Patty says, "I'm going to ask the teacher if I can be Mary this year." Marcie replies, "She already asked me, sir." But paying no attention, Peppermint Patty continues: "I think I'll be great in the part!" Marcie replies again, "She asked me yesterday, sir." But still not paying attention, Peppermint Patty goes on: "I really like the part where the angel Gabriel talks to me!"

And Marcie replies: "Why would the angel Gabriel talk to you? You never listen!"

We're here tonight to listen to what God is saying to us. We've come apart from the busyness this season can bring, the frenzy of contemporary life. We've put down our phones—unless you're using them to worship online via livestream, in which case, please carry on. But we're here tonight to listen.

And God has been speaking to us in all kinds of ways since the very beginning. We can hear God speaking to us through the beauty and diversity of creation. We can hear God speaking in acts of love and kindness, in courageous stands against injustice, and in the smallest gesture of hospitality or compassion. We can hear God speaking in actual words, the words of ancient prophets in the holy scriptures.

But then God spoke a new word, in a new way, one we probably wouldn't have expected. God spoke in the form of a person. Which is to say, at first, in the form of a baby.

He doesn't say much, the newborn Jesus. He lies in his manger bed. Which is not to say that, in the words of the carol, "no crying he makes." I've never seen a baby that didn't cry, and if Jesus wasn't fully a baby then he wasn't fully a human being. But Jesus is really one of us, all the way, not some kind of ethereal spirit-person. That's what makes him so compelling. He's not less human than we are: he's more. And he shows us what it would really be like to be fully human, all the way.

He would have more to say when he was older. Words like, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Words like, Whoever is without sin, let them cast the first stone. Words like, Whoever wants to be great among you must be a servant. Words like, I am the way, the truth, and the life. Words like, Follow me.

And he would also speak with his actions. Wherever he went, sick people were healed. People who had been cast out were restored to the community. Hungry people got fed. People got their dignity back. It was as if everybody around him found themselves becoming a little more human too.

Which is not to say that everyone enjoyed him. Because when he was around, he also had a way of showing up more clearly what was wrong in people's lives.

When people were stuck in their own possessions, their own egos, in oppressing others, in lies, and Jesus was around, they couldn't ignore it as well as they usually could. He was the truth, and he made the truth about people's hearts and lives stand out. Which, of course, is the first step towards healing. But not everyone was able to accept his invitation to turn around, to turn towards God and towards Neighbors, to be healed. Because when God speaks a word of truth about our lives, there is a part of us that wants to silence that word.

And so his journey led to the cross. But really the cross is another word God speaks to us: a word about just how far God's love is willing to go. The cross is of a piece with the manger. Jesus was rejected and died out of love for us, just as he was born in a stable out of love for us, to an un-famous and un-powerful couple forced to travel long and hard to a town where there was no room in the inn. That word of love can never stop speaking. When it was killed, it rose again, and he offers us his own risen immortal life to share.

Jesus is God's Word; Jesus is what God has to say to us. Not a word made of air from someone's vocal cords, or a word scratched out with ink on a piece of paper or parchment. A word that is a human life, the fullest, richest word God could ever speak to us. This person is what God wants to say to us, what God wants to tell us about who God is and who we are.

And he is here tonight, alive and in our midst. Come to him; to the manger; to the cross; to the table. O come, let us adore him.