

“The Christmas Spirit”

Isaiah 11:1-6

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of its roots.

The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.

The Christmas Spirit

Isaiah 11:1-6

December 4, 2022

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I.

I'd like to start this morning, right off the bat, by saying that Christmas is a peculiar and unusual thing. Even against sometime very long odds, Christmas is also fun, festive, frolicsome, wonderful, delightful, enchanting, heart-tugging, hope-restoring, soul-soaring and, quite simply, magical. Like a Charlie Brown Christmas tree. If we are being fair, however, Christmas can also be somewhat hectic, exhausting, saccharine and overdone as well. All bow and not very much in the box. In the final analysis, though, Christmas is a peculiar and unusual thing, and something we endeavor, each year at this time, to get into the Spirit of.

II.

This morning, I am pleased to report that the Spirit of Christmas is very much alive and well here at the Church on the Park. What a joy that this year we are finally getting back into the swing of all the things which make Christmas so special for each one of us.

Last Friday we had *hundreds* of people gather in the Park for the Holiday of Lights; to sit on Santa's lap and to warm themselves, inside and out, with hot cocoa and cookies here in our church's Fellowship Hall. Last Sunday we got out our gorgeous Advent candelabra, and following worship we had a great crew decking the halls with boughs, bows, trees, candles and creche. This coming Saturday the Church School kids will be feasting on pizza pies and practicing for the pageant which will take center stage in next Sunday's service. All week Ellen Grayson and her sister, Nancy, have been like elves in Santa's workshop making costumes for donkeys, shepherds and sheep.

III.

Following the hoo-haw of the pageant we will all, finally, join together once more to share in the return of the miracle of the potluck, so long overdue and greatly missed these past years, with a smorgasbord of food stretching out from stem to stern; a veritable banquet to which all are invited, with dishes both nutritious and sinfully delicious. Two weeks from today we'll gather for a Service of Lessons and Carols, to retell and rejoice in the ancient story of that first Christmas morn. Then, on Christmas Eve, the cattle will be lowing here in the sanctuary during our Candlelight service, with so many kids who will soon find it hard to sleep, as we laugh, celebrate and worship; and, then, end the evening by singing Silent Night before wishing to each and to all, a fair good-night, and pleasing dreams and slumber light.

IV.

Come the Sunday of Christmas morning, a hush will fall upon this place like the quiet of a new fallen snow, when all through this worshipping house not a creature will be stirring, not even Bob the church mouse. Though the Session's decision Monday night to concur with the congregation's consensus to *not* have worship on that Sunday may be a nod to simple pragmatism (sorry Luke, you'll just have suffer through a Sunday without church) I'm choosing, instead, to see it as a act of theological boldness and conviction that we can enjoy our Christian freedom in such a way; a testament to the Spirit of Christmas dwelling deep within our hearts, and made manifest in time spent with our families, unbound by the trappings of what Christmas *should* be. Good for us in allowing Christmas to arrive in our lives as all that it *might* be.

V.

Having said this, there is still one additional Christmas-time event, in particular, to which I would like to draw your attention. Last week following worship, and thanks to Keli's leadership and efforts, 40 kids, including about 10 church kids, gathered in our Fellowship Hall for a painting class. Add in the parents there to observe or assist, and the room was *packed* (see the December newsletter for photos). I purposefully made a point of attending for a few minutes in order to walk through the room and look at the painting each kid was doing.

My greater purpose, however, was to look at every *kid* while they were *doing* the painting. Their focus and delight in creating art was readily evident, with each kid rapt in attention at the opportunity to use their imaginations and to express themselves in such a wonderful way. What a HUGE gift to those kids and their parents! Thank you Keli, and Katie and Erin for helping!

VI.

Though each painting was of the same image, a Christmas elf or gnome, the variety of colors used and the various interpretations on the theme were *remarkable*. Walking between the rows of kids busy at work, I could see what I would call the influences of Impressionism, Pointillism, the Art Nouveau movement, Surrealism of the Salvador Dalian School (no small feat given the subject matter) and a whole lot of Avant-garde going on.

I, of course, paid close attention to the kids of our church, with one in particular, Vivian Casey, giving me a moment's pause, a great deal of delight, and *very* hearty chuckle (such that my belly shook like a bowl full of jelly) because the canvas upon which she painted was *upside-down*. Crack me up.

VII.

I looked over at her mom, Erin, who was seated nearby and we both smiled knowingly at each other and she gave me the shoulder-shrug, hands out and palms up gesture which I took to mean, "welcome to Vivian's world." *Kids, right!?!*



It is always a fine line to walk, as a parent, between gently but firmly guiding your child through the world in a certain direction while, at the same time, giving them the space, freedom and encouragement they need to find their own way which will, necessarily, be unique to *them*; especially when that path turns out to be rather peculiar and unusual in the estimation of the parent who knows from experience such a road will be the harder one. We all want what is best for our kids; which, as parents, usually means “easier. Sometimes, though, “easier” is not necessarily better.

VIII.

Today’s scripture reading, Isaiah 11:1-6, begins with the acknowledgement that the road which leads to the Messiah, the so-called “stump of Jesse,” has been a very hard one indeed; with Jesse being the father of David who would go on to be the first King of Israel. Use of the term “stump” signifies the mere remnant of Jesse’s family which would barely survive the centuries but which would, some 40 generations later, yield another King in the Davidic line or lineage who would be the Messiah.

Isaiah is foretelling of a child who would lead the people as a Savior. As Christians, we also understand this child to be the Savior; not just of a nation, however, but of all the world. A child born to parents whose best was to find shelter away in a mere manger. A child who would be peculiar and unusual. A child whom the Spirit of the Lord would be upon. A child sent to bring good tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to those who are bound.

IX.

Each year at this time, as we each seek to get into the Christmas Spirit, let us remember that the *real* spirit of Christmas is much more than mistletoe and holly, more than sleigh bells ringing, more than busy sidewalks and being dressed in holiday style, more than the prancing and pawing of hoof on the roof, and, yes, more than a jolly old elf all chubby and plump.

As wonderful as all of that is, and it is wonderful, the Christmas spirit is so much more peculiar and unusual. The Christmas spirit is the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge of the LORD. The Christmas spirit delights in amazement at all that God is doing in our lives; it does not judge by what the eyes see, or decide by what the ears hear but, instead, judges the poor with righteousness and decides with equity for the meek of the earth.

X.

As you go from this place today, or conclude the reading of these words, endeavoring to get into the Christmas Spirit, remember also to allow the Spirit of Christmas to get into *you* as we all seek to follow where a little child will lead us such that Christmas will arrive in our lives as all that it *might* be.
Amen.