

SERMON 817

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 22, 2013

925th Week as Priest

751st Week at St Dunstan's

16th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

INCARNATION

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

I came to my first Beans & Rice event yesterday morning here at the Church of the Epiphany in Tallassee. And it was quite an event!

Sara Willis and Mona Dominguez came with me, and we arrived at 8:30 to find people who had been standing in line for more than an hour.

The lawn surrounding the Little House was filled with cars, and there were many, many parishioners already here, already hard at work. Betty and Jimmy, of course. And Lee and Amanda. And Eddie and Pam, Barbara, Jean, Jere van Etten (I just like to say his whole name, Jere van Etten), Elizabeth Harber, Tom Bray, and Jeff (whose wrestling team arrived the same time that Cuyler and Wayles went to two Krogers to buy St Dunstan's food contribution, and then drove over from Auburn, and they unloaded about a thousand pounds of food on Thursday afternoon.)

I felt transported to an earlier time, almost 20 years ago, when I was the Vicar of St Michael's in Fayette and the President of West Alabama Bank & Trust. We had just bought a house next door to the bank and converted it into the new Christian Center of Concern. We gave away food on the first Wednesday afternoon each month in Fayette because the banks were all closed, and people were able to park in my bank parking lot.

(You see how things work to good for those who fear the Lord? Well, they do.)

Anyhow, that's what I was reminded of yesterday morning. It was chaotic and crowded and the Little House was filled to overflowing with food, and we stopped right before nine o'clock to say a prayer, asking God to bless us and the people who were here, and the work we were about to do. It's a good thing, a true blessing, that Betty is so well-organized. It was a blessing that all of you were here to make the system work. In two hours, we gave away over a ton of food to 70 families. The pantry was just about bare, and the freezer was cleaned out, and we were exhausted, but it was the work of the Lord that we did—in his Name, in the name of The Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, and in the name of the Episcopal Church USA and the worldwide Anglican Communion.

And we experienced something known as The Incarnation. It's true, and of this truth I have no doubt whatsoever.

The Incarnation is the single most important doctrine, or belief, of Christians and Christianity everywhere. Episcopalians, Baptists, Roman Catholics, you name it. We all believe in the Incarnation. It is

the affirmation that the Son of God took human flesh from his human mother, that is, he was born a child to the Virgin Mary. And furthermore, we believe with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength that the historical Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, is at once fully God and fully man. That, dear friends, is the Incarnation. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. Not half-and-half. Not switching between human and divine as the situation requires, but fully God and fully man.

He was not just a spirit, who took on the appearance of a human being. And he was not just a human being, who appeared to be so perfect and so wonderful that people thought he was a god. No, he was, and is, Emmanuel—that is, God who is with us.

There's more. I believe that we experienced the Incarnation at the Little House yesterday morning. There's an old gospel song that says, "There's a sweet, sweet spirit in this place." I looked at the faces of the poor—white and black, old and young—and I saw the face of Jesus Christ. I looked into the faces of Betty, Jimmy, Lee, Amanda, Eddie, Pam, Jean, Jere, Jeff, Mona, Sara, Barbara, Elizabeth, and Tom—and I saw the face of Jesus Christ.

It didn't matter that some of the people there might not have deserved the food they were given. It didn't matter where they were from, or where they were going next. It didn't matter that some of you weren't with us on Thursday, or Saturday, this time—because you have been in that place before, and you will come and help the next time, or the next, or the next.

You see, these things are not really within our control. The Great God of the Vast Universe is making and remaking and transforming

his Creation and his Creatures with a spirit of love, joy, hope, peace, and possibility. We are all coming more and more into his Presence, and our lives, our selves, are being changed by this Great God, through the work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is the perfecter of our faith. He is the captain of our souls. And you, dear friends, are powerless before him—because you have given your hearts to his love and opened your minds to his truth, and because the Holy Spirit is at work in you, and in us, and in this beautiful and holy place.

You are being filled with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit—which are Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Counsel, Strength, Faith, and Fear.

And you are showing forth in your lives—in your words and in your actions—the Fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Faithfulness, and Self-Control.

And there is nothing you can really do about it, except let it happen. Since you have accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord and Savior, go ahead and let your lives be built upon him. Dig your roots deep into him. And be filled with Thanksgiving. That is precisely what Saint Paul told the Colossians, and that is what I am telling you today.

Do not doubt the Incarnation. It is true and real. And do not doubt yourselves and the good work you are doing. It is of God. It is the Incarnation. It is true and real. And you are amazing people, and I love and admire you all. **AMEN.**

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