



**SAINT JAMES'**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
Fremont, California

## SERMON

28. December, 2008. Christmas I

Title: "Have Yourself A Light-filled New Year"

Text: St. John 1:1-18

J.J.

It's amazing how quickly some people can "put away" Christmas. Already, in Castro Valley, there are trees standing out at the curb with the trash, and KDFC has put all the Christmas music away. But, of course, if you have been celebrating Christmas ever since Halloween (as many have), it's time to move on. Now, depending upon your point of view, as one hears the Gospel reading for today, it would almost seem as if the Church is playing the same game: Christmas is done and gone; the Christmas stories are put away for another year; time to move on. Ah . . . but look a little closer at the text, or perhaps better said, listen a little more carefully, and you will begin to realize that today's Gospel reading is also a Christmas story, but only different. In reality, there are two sets of Christmas stories in the gospels: One set is from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke—the more familiar stories; and the other is from the Gospel of John. The one set is more concrete—Mary and Joseph, baby in the manger, shepherds and sheep, angels and angel choirs, wisemen and gifts; the other quite abstract and philosophical, but no less a Christmas story. John's story begins with a majestic hymn, setting the stage for a whole new order of life, forged in the beginning of Creation with the presence of the Word . . . that Word who is God . . . that Word who becomes human . . . that Word who lives among us, full of grace and truth . . . and is that not really what all of the Christmas stories are all about: God with us, full of grace and truth.

Once in awhile, people get a glimpse of what God is doing among us . . . what God is calling us to be . . . what God is calling us to do. Once in awhile the light shines so brightly in the darkness that nothing can dim it. Once in awhile people feel an upwelling of joy in their hearts, and they don't even know where it comes from. For us, these days of Christmas—yes, I am talking about the twelve days of Christmas (and we're on day three)—for us, these days of Christmas not only call us to celebrate (or to continue to celebrate), but they also call us to re-order and perhaps to re-frame our lives so that we can live differently, not because it's time for some kind of New Year's resolution. No! But because Jesus has come to live among us to show us the way . . . a new way.

Recently, I read a homily by the Rev. Ben Helmer, an Interim Ministry Developer with the Episcopal Church, who helped me to think through this new way. As the old year draws to a close, he invites us to think about all that has happened this past year: the collapse of the world economic engine and the recession in which we find ourselves; the election of a new president who will take office amidst the ravages of war and terrorism and economic chaos; the loss of savings and retirement income and jobs. He points out that many of the things we rely on for our security have vanished, and consequently, many of us find ourselves down and out. But into the midst of our chaos and lowliness, God appears . . . God enters our hearts with a love that cannot be extinguished . . . God takes our puzzlement and our failure, and redeems them with new insight . . . God lightens our darkness in the face of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who has come to live among us . . . full of grace and truth.

Ah, but if the light truly shines in the darkness, as St. John tells us, then where in all the world have we been living? Some would point out that many of us have chosen darkness over the light: We have chosen to live on credit. We have chosen to live beyond our means as a nation and a people. We have forgotten that there is always a price to pay for greed – a price paid by all of us. And if we are honest, we have to admit that deep down, we all knew this economic splurge would have to end; hoping it would end “not with a bang, but a whimper,” as T.S. Eliot wrote in one of his poems. But “bang” it did! So, how is it with you as the old year passes? Are you simply waiting to see when the other shoe will drop? Are you waiting for a new president to do something big and bold? Well, he doesn’t have any money either. It has all been committed to war and bailouts. So . . . now what?

Frankly, it’s time to go to work . . . time to act like the gifted people God has created us to be . . . time to be about God’s business—and I am using that word “business” on purpose—time to be about God’s business in our churches, in our communities, in our families, and in our world . . . time to engage in a business that is committed to redemption; a business that brings graciousness to the lives of all people. That is what we want to be doing as the New Year dawns upon us, because that is what God has done and is doing for us. So . . . welcome to the twelve hallowed days of Christmas. May they be days in which you see the Word, made flesh, scatter the darkness from before your path and empower you to give light to others. Have yourself a blessed Christmas and a happy, and light-filled, New Year. Amen.

S.D.G.

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