

December 25, 2009
Christmas Day
The Rev. Kathy Crary

St James Episcopal Church

A blessed and marvelous day to all of you.

Christmas is filled with memories that get triggered by all kinds of things. Smells are pretty evocative, like the smells of the church right after you extinguish beeswax candles or a simmering pot of wassail on our stovetop. Sounds are evocative, especially the Christmas carols and what passes for Muzak in the stores these days. However, I will confess that rap Christmas carols have not caught on for me. Maybe it is just a matter of time!

I remember from my Lutheran Church Missouri Synod days when the Eucharistic Prayer began the pastor says, "It is meet, right and salutary...." One of the young people in the congregation, her name is Paula, heard these words and she thought he had said, "It is neat, right and sanitary...." I wasn't attending the congregation when she heard/misheard these words, she told me about them a few years after the fact. I laughed pretty hard, and remembered all of the things children hear in church that we didn't say. It becomes the "Merzee dotes, and Dozee dotes, and little lamsidivee" mistakes in hearing that make all of us smile. The favorite is Round John Virgin, the guy who stands next to Mary in the Nativity scenes and crèches.

One thing Christmas tells us is that Christianity is not neat, right and sanitary. We don't follow the normative idea of a God UP THERE and all of us down here. We don't believe in a God who responds to a whim like the pantheon of Greek and Roman gods of antiquity, but rather believe in a God with purpose and intention.

We believe in a faith that doesn't insist that we are right but that we are faithful. If we were right all the time, there is no need for confession, no need to hear about forgiveness. But we are human... and this baby who is the focus of our worship on Christmas Day was born as a human. And so that mystery of God made flesh and this child Jesus is wrapped in swaddling clothes and in a good bit of mystique and awe.

Neat, right and sanitary; well, anyone who has handled a baby knows that sanitary is out the window. Babies are loud, messy and imposing. They have a way of making their needs known. Singular attention is paid to their needs, as indeed they won't survive if we don't take care of them. Christianity presents its own earthy challenges. In our own denomination, we have believed and preached that new purity codes are not the Gospel message. We come to a manger, in a stable, to see an infant, newborn into difficult circumstances.

Christianity is not neat, right or sanitary. Christianity is a wonderful mix of a great God, an inspiring Savior, a Spirit that moves in us and among us, along with temptations, growing up, growing in faith and working for the dignity of others. This Christian life is filled with ups and downs, struggles, crises of faith, days of confusion, times of sorrow and fear. It is also filled with hope, promise and expectation.

Those are the days, the days of hope, promise and expectation, that bring us to our celebrations and to our knees on Christmas Day. The angels have been here and gone, the shepherds have checked it out and gone back to their flocks by day and we are here, with Mary, to ponder these things in our hearts.