

**The Rev. Victoria Kirk Mouradian
Sermon for All Saints by-the-Sea
Christmas Eve, Dec. 24, 2013**

Readings: Year A, B, and C - Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-20.

Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Yes, we are. This question and answer will have very different meanings to each of us. To our younger flock or the younger-at-heart flock, the anticipation of Santa will end this night. To those of us who share in Christmas exchanges of love and generosity, now is the time. To those of us who will break very special bread together, some of us together for the first time, the waiting is over. To those of us who have ensured that a stranger would not be forgotten on Christmas, it is time to feel the peace our gesture brings. For those of us who can't wait to celebrate the glorious birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we now begin. To those of us who embrace all or a part of what I have just mentioned, may God's Christmas blessings be upon you.

Every year during December, I can't help but think of my children's favorite holiday story. I would like to share it with you. It was about a man obsessed with having the most dramatic light show at his house for the season. He wanted to show heaven and earth the glory of his lights. He glutted his property with every type of decoration that could move or light up. When he could not get enough electricity for his project, he naughtily siphoned from his neighbors. On his off time from work, he was either at the hardware store looking for additional decorations or he was busy installing them. Budget, what budget?? That's what plastic was for. His family was dismayed. He had no time for them because he was constantly adding on to his Christmas project. He wanted the entire town to drive by and see his festive accomplishment.

He wanted God to notice. He wanted Santa to see the exact location of his house. He was a man driven. He was a man on a mission. He would show the world what it meant to be ready for Christmas!

And then on Christmas Eve, after he finished his one last installation, his family, neighbors, and local townspeople gathered outside the house. It was to be the most dramatic event of the season. With great ceremony, he flicked on the great switch of his creation. In an instant, the light show became like “the rockets’ red glare, the bombs bursting in air” to the tune of *Frosty the Snow Man*. All who were present were gasping in awe. And then, in the blink of an eye, the neighborhood was plunged into darkness! Not a sound was uttered. The bursts of light and fireworks were none other than the massive display of fuses blowing and light bulbs popping from the electrical overload. The greatest Christmas show on earth had come to a shattering halt. Our man wanted to hide.

As people returned to their homes, the friends across the street gently invited the man and his family to come in, warm up by their fire and have some food. It was going to be a long night without electricity. As they huddled around the fireplace, his family and friends assured him that they really knew he meant well, and yes, he was oh so talented, but perhaps he had let his mission consume him. They missed the man they had known and loved and quite frankly, they no longer recognized him. He had been so obsessed with the look of Christmas that he had completely forgotten the meaning of Christmas. He had neglected all that was important to him in the pursuit of his far reaching idea. I’m glad to say that the story did have a very happy ending as the man realized the error of his ways and experienced the love and acceptance of his

family and friends. He also learned that God's beautiful creation of the stars in the sky was really all the light that was needed to usher in the Christ child.

I can understand wanting to see something magical during the holidays. Two weeks ago I succumbed to the urge to pursue holiday cheer at Disneyland, the land of the ultimate Christmas light show. If there was ever a place to be in denial of the wrongs of the world, Disneyland is it. The park was decked to the hilt and some rides were transformed inside as well as out with holiday décor. Fantasyland Castle boasted snow resting on turrets and towers sparkling with little blue lights. You could sing along to *Deck the Halls* in the Small World ride instead of singing the usual *It's a Small World After All*. No words could adequately describe the holiday glitz on display: garlands and trees and ornaments and lights and dazzling mouse ears in red and green. And the food, it awaited you at every turn. You wouldn't think there was a hungry mouth on the planet. The park was an ongoing "Kodak moment." For a day, the thought of misery and suffering in the world eluded me. (Of course, Disneyland could present a whole new meaning of suffering to some...)

I doubt the idea of honoring God was front and center in most people's mind at the park. We were all there for family fun and distraction. "Merry" in the greeting "Merry Christmas" took on a whimsical quality there. But it did make me think joy, celebration, festivity. It did make me want to smile and by the looks on the faces of children and others, it made them want to smile too.

This time of the year can smack of consumerism, but I also know that beautiful lights,

decorated Christmas trees, garlands and flowers, make me feel that something really exciting is going on. The air seems charged in a way that affects others, regardless of faith. It seems that for a month people actively think of ways to make others happy. So many efforts are put into feeding the poor, clothing the homeless, bringing joy to shut-ins and hospitalized. Contributions pour in for victims of natural disaster or oppression. Appreciation is expressed to bosses, employees, and all those in the work force. There is an outpouring of greetings to those in the armed forces. Alternative markets supply hope to those in underdeveloped countries. Families come together. Friends are remembered. Cards are sent, phone calls made. Self-absorption is more easily deflected. If the true message of God incarnate is too much for some to understand, then the message of loving thy neighbor as self seems to come in loud and clear. And God of course especially wants us to hear that.

So, here we are, almost two thousand years after the birth of Christ. What compels us to believe in the Christmas story, or try to believe in the Christmas story, or try to take part in the Christmas story despite unbelief? There's got to be more to it than Christmas trees and lights and presents. What generates the spirit of giving and the desire for peace on earth? What keeps the story alive? It is not the telling of the story. **It is the living of the story.**

An inspirational story can be handed down from generation to generation but does that make you want to live it? I'm inspired by the life of George Washington, but the real or fictional story about confessing to his father that he could not tell a lie after chopping down the cherry tree, does not make me want to never tell a lie. It does not breathe life into my life. The Christmas story of God becoming Jesus would only be a story if it didn't breathe life into my

life. As an Episcopal priest, I can stand here and tell you that God was born through Christ by the Virgin Mary, but I can't convince you. I can tell you about God's unconditional love for you but my words are only words. If somehow they inspire you, then they have become alive to you. Look all around you this Christmas Eve and see all that has been accomplished this December. Truly ponder, what on earth is that all about?

Joyously we come together this evening. We join those who believe or those who doubt, but all who love. We remember that God's love for us was ultimately expressed in the human form of Jesus, that we might better understand the meaning of love our neighbor as ourselves. We are blessed with the wonder of this good news. So we join with angels and archangels, shepherds and wise ones, saints and sinners, families and friends, loved ones here and those in our hearts to relive the beautiful Christmas story. May God bless you.

Amen.