

2 Christmas

January 5, 2014

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Jeremiah 31:7-14

During Babylon exile-Israel is redeemed by God's love, not their efforts.

Psalms 84:1-8

Happy are the people whose strength is in you! whose hearts are set on the pilgrims' way (to worship God).

Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19a

God has blessed us to be holy and blameless before him, destined for adoption.

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Joseph follows 'dreams', Herod kills innocents. God protects Jesus.

Although Christmas Day is past, and the anxious crowds have left the stores; Christmas season continues in the church until sundown tonight. And so the Scripture readings for today continue to connect to the theme of Christmas, which is the theme of incarnation. This season is not only a celebration of the incarnation of the Son of God as Jesus 2,000 years ago. We also celebrate that the incarnation of God in Jesus continues today as Jesus' incarnation in us.

To some degree we can relate to this idea of having the influence of others incarnate in us.

My parents – I see their faces and hear their voices many times in my life. They still inspire me to call people older than me by their last name until I know them. Dick Spry, my Scout master – gave me confidence that I could splint a broken arm, build a campfire, and tie knots that wouldn't fall apart.

Frank Gordon, HS science teacher – encouraged me to compete and win prizes in science fairs, and to apply for college even though I didn't feel smart enough, and knew my family didn't have the money.

To some degree, I see that these people live in me, even though they are no longer people I talk to or meet with.

Paul wrote to his church in Ephesus that God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing, to be holy and blameless before him (blameless before God) in love. It is easy to skim over that sentence in the reading. I mean, do you feel holy and blameless very often? Ever? But there is a way that we can feel that way.

To be Holy is to be set apart for God's purpose (like a church, or the life of a saint).

Blameless must mean to accept that Jesus has settled any fault we carry in us.

You and I can decide to cooperate with the intention God has to use us for his purpose.

We can also ignore God's intention. But Jesus taught that it is God's intention to use you and me to change the world from down here, sort of from the inside – out. When we cooperate with God's intention for us, we become holy in God's eyes.

You and I can decide to accept that many actions of humanity, and our own actions, often fall short of God's plan, and in fact create a fault that needs to be settled with God. We can also decide that what God did through the birth of His Son; not only at Jesus' human birth, but also through Jesus' birth within us; that is meant to pay the debt, to settle the separation, so that we are free and invited to be the Family of God.

Joseph had PLENTY of divine guidance to ensure the safety of that precious Child born in Bethlehem. An angel appeared to reassure Joseph that he could wed Mary; later events seem to indicate that God knew that Mary would need Joseph to wrap on doors in Bethlehem until the 'right' innkeeper was found. Mary would need Joseph to listen to another angel in order to get them out of harm's way from King Herod's ego maniacal protection of his kingship. Then there was another angel guiding Joseph to lead Mary and Jesus out of Egypt and back to Israel; and then another angel to guide them not back to Judah, but to Galilee, to the city of Nazareth. God was in the details of the whole story.

The people from our past who live in us have helped direct our path to where we are now, and to some extent who we are now. Even more, Jesus' presence in us brings divine benefits. Paul said, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ... may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that... you may know what is the hope to which He has called you." If you and I decide to live for Jesus, then we, our flesh and blood and mind and spirit are guided by Jesus' wisdom, and by God's plan to reveal Himself to the world.

Jesus was born into flesh and blood existence in Bethlehem; and he is born within you and me. He lives through us, and empowers us to transform our lives, and the lives of people around us.

>My being appointed chaplain by a family in Villages 2 days before Christmas, yesterday, today. Changed lives.

>Our response to Laura Lewis's email to adopt a family in SJ for XMS. \$845 for 3 very needy families. Changed lives.

>3 new children in preschool tomorrow, 1 more returning after leaving-'we need this school'. Changed lives.

This plan of God's, to send a Son who would teach and demonstrate, who would encourage and enable, who would keep being reborn in us as we keep experiencing more of life and more of God, who would keep working in us to be more like him, seeking for ourselves something greater than we could imagine for ourselves, this is the inspiring story of Christmas, which deserves its own season to ponder, and to pray over, and to find ways to carry the power of that message into 2014. So what decisions will you make about God being made incarnate?

For the last time until next winter, Merry Christmas.