

Sermon

All Saints' Episcopal Church

The Rev. Martha Sterne
24 December, 2016



Grace to you and peace in the name of the Prince of Peace.

For unto us a child is born.

On a starry night long ago and far away, a little baby was born. And he looked just like you did when you were born – beautiful of course and a little bloody and slippery and oh so helpless. And he looked just like a little baby being born this night in the ruins of Aleppo or in a refugee camp in Malaysia or a reservation in Nevada or a failing town in Ohio or a slum in Rio or the Ritz in Paris or a little baby born anywhere at all. As my very wicked Uncle Dick says every time he is called upon to gush over a newborn, he says, well, well, well – looks ... just like a baby! Now when our windows guru Felicia Guest sees a baby she draws on the gospel according to Elvis: Felicia says, “Ohhh, isn’t that a hunk of burning love.” And Uncle Dick and Felicia and Elvis are right! Our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus was born just like every other baby, a hunk, a hunk of burning love. Just like us.

And just like all of us even before he was born, he was a traveler! Where do we come from? That’s where he came from. Yes. And on top of that whole epic journey we all take from eternity into the here and now – that little fellow still in his mother’s womb underwent an incredibly inconvenient trip due to the whim of an unpredictable government that Nobody voted for. It’s Seventy miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem—under the circumstances that must have seemed like another eternity.

They would have had to deal with the usual traffic – we think we’ve got it bad – they had an imperial occupying army and the incessant skirmishes between their people and the Samaritans – nobody trusted the Samaritans. None of the Jews had ever heard of even one good Samaritan and vice versa. And unto this distrust among peoples that little baby was born. And how naïve of us sophisticated smart people to assume we could think or invent or progress or politic our way out of the traffic jams and road rages and perplexities and vagaries and distrusts and just plain old sins of the human heart? Not then, not now. That’s why dear ones we need a burning love savior so. For real.

I imagine he arrived early, don’t you? After days on a bumpy road, the pregnant teenager carrying what feels at eight months like the heaviest load in the world, the baffled father looking at her, checking the distance in his mind, just doing the next right thing he can—if we saw them on that trip – we would never say it was a hopeful situation. Nobody would. But they – those ordinary people, not as resourced as anybody in this room – carry in the depths of their hearts and souls – remember Joseph had a dream, Mary had a vision—so they carry in their depths God’s hope! Just yet unborn.

Even the donkey shows up with something great. That donkey was the brawn of the situation and he sniffs the smell of freshest hay from miles and miles away – and if that donkey is like the donkeys I have known back in Mississippi – he just keeps sniffing the air and braying for the heaven of it and clip-clopping them right to where the good stuff was waiting—the hospitable inn keeper with no room but in his heart, the surprising perfection of the stable which was the worst accommodation in the joint and yet it was perfect and holy! And the oxens’ sweet breath and gentle hulk, the clean, soft hay

All Saints' Episcopal Church

634 West Peachtree Street NW • Atlanta, Georgia 30308

Telephone 404-881-0835 • Facsimile 404-881-3796

www.allsaintsatlanta.org

that was sublime not just for the donkey but for the birth. And chickens clucking and starlight shimmering through the cracks right on the manger, and distant sweet sounds like angels singing. And so this night by the power of the memory and the hope in the parents – remember we’ve all got that – and by the grace of God - remember we’ve all got that - a baby just like us was born into a not hopeful situation and made it the meeting place of heaven and earth!

On a day when you feel helpless, remember this. On a night when you feel hopeless, remember this. Even the Savior of the world began life, like all of us, powerless! Alert about one hour out of ten. He couldn’t lift his head or turn over and could only focus at first on things about eight or nine inches away – just about the distance to a parent’s face. This night at his birth when angels sing and shepherds quake he is a full month of life away from those little holy, healing hands even unfolding. It will be another month before he starts to chuckle and “smile with purpose” the baby books say. And just like with us it will be longer yet before he rolls over or sits up much less crawls - and then just to the other side of the rug. And then and then we know for it has been passed down to us what will he do? He will rise up and he will walk and he will talk and he will touch and heal and inspire and love and love and by the power of burning love, he will change the world. And do you think that was a one time deal? Do you think well now that’s over? NO, No, that is why we gather here tonight and I beg you to invite others – the biggest disease we’ve got in this world is human isolation – so invite, invite to the life and ministries of this pretty stable filled with innkeepers and shepherds and seekers and yes oxen and chickens and okay we all take our turns being the jackasses. Tell yourself, tell your friends—it’s not over. We are just getting started.

For unto us a child is born, a Savior which is Christ the Lord. Looking just like a baby, just like a hunk, a hunk of burning love. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will towards all peoples. Pass it on and on and on. amen

All Saints’ Episcopal Church

634 West Peachtree Street NW • Atlanta, Georgia 30308

Telephone 404-881-0835 • Facsimile 404-881-3796

www.allsaintsatlanta.org