

Mill Creek United Methodist Church
Solon, Iowa
Rev C A Kress

December 25, 2011

Prayer

Here we are! Is Christmas being good for you? Is it going to be good for you? I know that some of us have had to work through some sadness this season; my prayer is that you're finding a new, deeper meaning to Christmas. It's there. It really is.

I can still remember counting down the nights before Christmas with my sister, Mary Ellen. We would talk about how many more days until the big day came. And Mary was good at math, so she could count the day's right down! It would get a little harder to fall asleep as those days wound down. And then, we'd say to each other, "Tonight's the night!" We would be filled with the anticipation of what we were going to find under the tree on Christmas morning.

Last night the services were filled with kids who were wound up tight as drums, trying so hard to be good and yet so full of excitement for Christmas.

But last night was the night, and here we are today!

My family came down from Waterloo and Independence to be here, and we are going on to Iowa City after the service to see what Santa brought Ruby. But many families have traveled far, much farther than we did to be together for the celebration.

The church is as pretty as I have ever seen it; I love the poinsettias and tree. And it's great to see the choir in their new robes. It's just awesome that you're here on Christmas Day. We're going to remember this one, we really will.

The whole season is good. But I don't know if that's how Mary and Joseph felt on that first Christmas. I have a feeling they were joyful, but bewildered.... Joyfully bewildered

And then there are angels who appeared to the shepherds. Were they bewildered too? Angels were, well they are angelic! They're special and they only come when something awesome is in the works.

But, what were they doing appearing to Shepherds? Shepherds are the folks who couldn't find any decent jobs. They're like the last ones you'd want your daughter to marry. Shepherds are poorly-paid, they're not trustworthy, and they're low men on the totem pole.

How joyfully bewildered were they to discover they had been chosen to hear the Good news of Christ's birth. And they were the very first ones!

The child of God is born for you!

If you were here last night you had the opportunity to hear a reader's theater production of the Christmas Miracle of Jonathon Toomey. I'm very appreciative of everyone who helped us move forward with the production. We made the best of our sound system issues and the readers sailed forward to move us into the Christmas spirit. Thank you.

The first time I tried to organize something like that we used a book entitled THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER. In that story the church is preparing a Christmas Pageant and due to a series of unforeseen circumstances everything goes topsy-turvy. The Herdman children – the big old family that lives on the wrong side of the tracks and is seldom-if-ever seen in Sunday school happen to wander into the first rehearsal for the Christmas pageant.

They become interested in the whole thing. While the other kids have been heard it all a million times before, the story is new and fresh to the Herdmans. They want to hear it, absorb it and eventually live it. To the dismay of the adults whose children were supposed to star in the pageant the Herdman children end up with most of the main roles. Everyone is certain the pageant is going to be a big disaster.

It's a great story. It's easy to find and I hope you take the opportunity to read it sometime.

In one of the best scenes, little Gertie Herdman steps forward. She's the angel who is to announce the holy baby's birth. She points to the shepherd (her bigger brothers among them) and she shouts, "Hey! You're Savior's been born!"

And that's all she's supposed to do – but Gertie is the little sister. She rarely if ever gets center stage. So, she isn't about to step out of the spot light easily. And remember the story is all new to her. She's caught up in it and so she just keep going in her excitement. "Hey! Your Savior's been born!" She begins pointing to people in the congregation. "Your Savior's been born! And yours too!" What fun.

A Savior has been born for the shepherds who didn't have the respect of any one: and for the Herdman kids from the wrong side of the tracks – for everyone in that congregation, and everyone HERE – A CHILD IS BORN! A Savior has been born for you!

Maybe we don't say it enough – maybe it should be said every week that our Savior has been born!

He is a Savior who shines light in darkness; who gives hope to the discouraged; who fills the emptiness. He is a Savior who forgives. He saves us from all that makes us less than God intends us to be.

A child has been given to us. A child has been born, a Son given, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

We've been waiting these past weeks – waiting to fully celebrate, to sing the carols together, to hear the angel's words and to hear this familiar scripture read once more.

We've been waiting in many more ways than one. And the wait isn't easy.

But today the waiting is over. We have received good news.

Because of it we have a reason to hope and laugh and rejoice.

We are loved by God with a deep, lasting, eternal, and certain love.

A Savior is born for you!

For years Alan's wife had been inviting him to go to the Christmas Eve service with her and the kids.

And for years he had resisted the invitation. He had other things to do, like stir the soup, or walk the dog; he even offered to run to the store for last-minute gifts. Alan just didn't go to church.

But this year, in order to keep peace in the family, and to show them that he wasn't chicken. Alan attended the Christmas Eve service. He arrived there feeling like a fish out of water, hoping to just quietly slip in and out, without being noticed.

But it didn't happen like that. The minute he walked in the door one of the people who had a reputation for never missing a Church service – ever - stuck out his hand and grasped Alan's in his. Saying, "It's so nice to have you here!" It felt alright to shake that hand.

The children's choir was singing and it was the last year his middle child would be in the group. (That's the real reason Alan had been talked into attending. It was his last opportunity to see his kid sing in the Children's Choir). The time came for the children to file up to sing. And as they came in the side door Alan's child spotted his dad there. And that child's face beamed with pride. In their special way, the children sang about that special baby Jesus. The music was bright and heart-warming. And to his surprise, something in that song touched Alan.

He felt good. He felt better! It was as if his lungs were able to take in more air. His heart was beating stronger. This dad who was only doing his duty found himself wrapped up in the moment. Alan became aware of God's presence, God's power, God's forgiveness, God's love. Right then and there, when he least expected it Alan understood what it means to worship. By the time those little candles were lit while the whole room sang Silent Night Alan was a goner. He was a changed man. He was joyfully bewildered.

Well, today is Christmas Day. Today I offer you the news that changed Alan's life. It the same good news that changed life for those Herdman kids from the wrong side of the tracks. It's the good news that changed life for the Shepherds on the hillside as it did Mary and Joseph. It's news that changed the course of human history and still has the potential to leave us joyfully bewildered too.

To you this day in the city of Bethlehem a child is born, a son is given, a Savior is born. He was born for you and you and you and you!