



BULLETIN INSERTS

December 24, 2017 – Advent 4 (B) The Presiding Bishop's Christmas Message

In 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul says, “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new is come.” At a point in that passage, St. Paul says, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself,” and he also says at another point in the same passage, “and we have been given the ministry of reconciliation.”

Have you ever gone to the movies or read a story or a novel, and the novel starts with the end, so you know where the story ends, but then the rest of the story or the novel is actually the story behind the story. We know about Christmas. We know about Mary. We know about Joseph. We know about the angels singing *Gloria in excelsis deo*. We know from our childhood the animals in the stable. We know of the magi who come from afar, arriving around Epiphany, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. We know of the angels singing in the heavens, and the star that shown above them. Therein is the story.

But the story behind the story is what St. Paul was talking about. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and Jesus has now given us that same ministry of reconciliation. God was reconciling the world to himself by becoming one of us. The divine became human. God entered history. Eternity became part of time. God was reconciling the world to himself by actually living it himself. In Jesus, God came among us to show us the way, to be reconciled with the God who has created us all and everything that is. And God has likewise come in the person of Jesus, to show us how to be reconciled with each other, as children of the one God who is the Creator of us all. That's the story behind Christmas.

God is showing us the Way to become God's children, and as God's children, brothers and sisters of each other. God is showing us in Jesus how to become God's family and how to change, and build, and make a world where everybody is a part of that family. Where children don't go to bed hungry. Where no one has to be lonely. Where justice is real for all and where love is the ultimate law.

Know there is a story behind the story, and it's a story worth singing about, and giving thanks for, and then living. One of my favorite writers, the late Howard Thurman, composed a poem many years ago about Christmas, and he says it probably better than I:

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
Then the work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace to others,
And alas, to make music in the heart.*

The story behind the story is that God so loved the world, and so loves you, and so loves me. Have a blessed Christmas, a wonderful New Year, and go out and make music in the heart of the world.

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