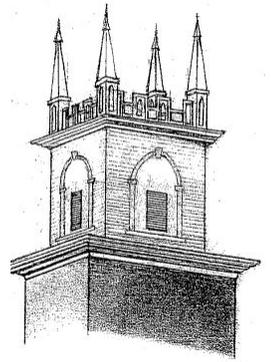


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Vol. 23 No.01

January 2023

Message from the Pastor

With the New Year upon us, you will notice some changes in our newsletter format—fewer sheets of paper allow for more efficient assembling and timely delivery. As we are going to press on the fourth day of Christmas, I share with you my Christmas Eve message. Despite icy roads and frigid temperatures, over fifty people, including seven children, filled our church as we heard lessons and sang carols



Christmas Eve Message, 2022

Michael F. Dwyer, Pastor

Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light
The hope and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

The longer we live, the longer our kaleidoscope of Christmas memories. Why do these memories remain so powerful? Why do they elicit such strong emotional responses? One reason is that Christmas carols, whether heard or sung, become part of us. Close your eyes for a moment and replay the voice of a favorite singer or voices from a choir. Do you hear what I hear? It is different for every one of us.

In addition to what we hear in our imagination, we also hold vivid images of lights, candles, Christmas trees, stockings, gift packages, and in many of our homes, a Nativity set or creche. Our Nativity set, part of my family's Christmas collection, has been with me for over fifty years, and although carefully wrapped and put away each year, some of the pieces are a bit worn and chipped. Nevertheless, I would not attempt to replace it.

Along with the sounds and pictures of Christmases past, we also recall bits and pieces of the familiar lessons we have heard this evening. How did you first hear the Christmas story? Did your parents or grandparents read to you? Did you learn it in Sunday school? Did you have a favorite television special? Though not exactly religious, I remember when “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” was new. Did you ever participate in a Christmas pageant? I was once a singing shepherd, a one-time only appearance. Then came decades of singing in a choir. Those continued experiences certainly reinforced the Christmas narrative.

Inevitably during the Christmas season, we think about those friends and family members no longer with us in person. Because they live in our hearts, we keep them with us to become a part of our own personal Christmas pageant. Sometimes the sting of disappointment touches us over gifts never received or never give. Yes, Christmas has its moments of sadness. Many of us probably know someone who expresses “Bah, humbug.” One of my acquaintances, lapsing into cynicism said, “Christmas is only for children.”

You—we—would not be here on Christmas Eve if you believed that statement. Let us now move from all the joys, all the hopes, and the fulnesses of heart that lie deep within our memory bank to Christmas present, Anno Domini, 2022, and our presence together in this church. Once again, we have a grace-filled opportunity to contemplate the magnitude and marvel of the child Jesus coming into this world in such humble circumstances. Love came down on Christmas Day.

Consider applying this principle of physics to Christmas then, now, and forever. Energy is never lost. It assumes a different form. Let us return, like shepherds and wise men, to stand, to kneel at the extraordinary event, the moment of the birth of Emmanuel, God-with-us—God *is* with us, not *was* with us. Let all the Christmas energy of warmth, love, peace, goodwill, and generosity go forth into a world that so sorely needs it. Sing in your hearts the words you know by heart the whole year through.

Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.
Jesus, Lord, at that birth.

With shared blessings,

Michael F. Dwyer, Pastor