

Year C, December 24, 2018  
Christmas Eve  
Christ Church, Mexia

We just heard again the beautifully written story of the birth of Jesus by the author of Luke, as we do every year at this service. I truly love this story and I love to talk about it and what it means, but tonight I want to do something a little different. So please bear with me for a moment.

First, I want to share with you a thought by Br. James Koester, SSJE, about tonight: "The truth is we all need a savior because the world isn't all we know it can be. It wasn't then and it's not now. It wasn't for Isaiah, and it isn't for us. It wasn't for the psalmist, and it isn't for us. Life isn't what we frequently pretend it to be; nor is the world. And that's the whole point of Christmas." So, Christmas is important! It's a big deal!

Second, the Rev. Whitney Rice tells us: "Christmas is not an event. Christmas is not a holiday. Christmas is not a church service. Christmas is not a set of familiar carols or decorations of red and green or a jolly man in a red suit with eight tiny reindeer. Christmas is not an occasion or a party or a festival. It is not a piece of history or time off from work or a gathering with a family." These are all connected to Christmas now, but we must be careful that thinking about these things and characterizing Christmas with such labels and accouterments can trivialize it.

Third, I want to talk with you briefly about the founder of the Colgate-Palmolive Company. I bet you didn't see that coming. It is one of the oldest firms in the US, which first began business in 1806. It was started by a young man named William Colgate, who left home at 16 years of age because his father was poor and could no longer support him. On his way to New York City, carrying all that he owned in one little bundle carried in his hand, he happened to meet an old neighbor, a canal boat captain.

"Well, William, where are you going?" asked the man. "I don't know," replied William. And he went on to say that he didn't know how to do anything except make soap and candles. "Well," said the old man, "let me pray with you and give you some advice." After praying for William, he gave this advice: "Someone will soon be the leading soapmaker in New York. It can be you as well as anyone. I hope it may. Be a good man; give your heart to Christ; give the Lord

all that belongs to Him of every dollar you earn; make an honest soap; give a full pound, and I am certain you will yet be a prosperous and rich man.”

When William got to NYC he followed the old man’s advice – he joined a church, dedicated himself to Christ, started his business and gave 10 percent of his first dollar, and every dollar thereafter, to God. In fact, before long, he began to give 20%, then 30%, then 40%, and finally 50% of his income to God. Later in life, when he had become so successful, he gave his entire yearly income, 100%, to God.

And why do I tell you that story? It’s not to embarrass you into giving more to the church. It isn’t even about stewardship. It is about choice. William made a conscious choice, and in the words of Rev. Rice, Christmas is a choice! – not an event, etc., but a choice.

God gave us the greatest gift ever in the history of mankind! God came down to earth and took human form, as told in the story of Luke. God did that because God loved us so much that God wanted to be closer to us. God wants us to know truth and grace. God wants us to know joy that exceeds our wildest imaginations. It is a gift, but it is our choice.

We don’t have a choice about many of the things in our lives. And you can probably think of many. Now, it’s true that making this choice may cause us at times to go against “conventional wisdom” or even to do some things we might rather not do. There is a very small cost, but so small in comparison to the benefits and the joy received.

So, remember tonight, as Br. James, reminds us: “The mystery of Bethlehem is that God can be born in the hearts of God’s people. For God chooses the hearts of those who love (God) in which to be born. The mystery of Bethlehem is that wherever you are, Jesus is waiting to be born in the stable of your heart and the glory of God’s light is waiting to dawn in your life.” That’s the story tonight.

Christmas is a choice. Make the choice! It’s a choice you will never regret.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.  
*Amen.*