

Glories Stream
Psalm 86 86:9-11; Luke 2:8-20
December 9, 2018 – Second Sunday of Advent

Those who are regular attendees at our worship service know that I always begin my message with the same prayer. That prayer begins by asking God to open our eyes to see the wonders of God's creation. Some have suggested that I vary that prayer, that I should not always use the same prayer; but that prayer is important to me. It asks that I might first always see the amazing things that God has done and is doing; secondly, it asks that I hear God's call on my life; and thirdly, it asks that I with have the faith, the strength and the courage to respond to that call. I regularly pray that for myself, and for every member of our congregation.

But today, I would like to concentrate of the first part of that prayer: "God, open our eyes that we might see the wonders of your creation." Friends, I never cease to be amazed by the universe in which we live. Our blue and green planet is truly beautiful, and the created order. . . emphasis on "order," is amazing. There is a balance of animals breathing in oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide, while plants are turning that carbon dioxide back into oxygen. There are amazing ecosystems balancing birth, death, decomposition, and rebirth of all living things. There are literally millions of tiny microbes; and there are giant whales. And that list goes on.

Then there is the rest of the universe – more stars in the sky than grains of sand on the earth; and we really haven't a clue how many planets might be orbiting those stars or what kind of life might exist on those planets. And then there are nebulas and quasars and black holes, the nature of which we are just beginning to understand. And, I won't begin to get into the really theoretical stuff like "String Theory" and "Alternative Universes." Indeed all this is truly beyond human comprehension. It's truly amazing; and it's truly beautiful.

But let's return the earth and the simple beauty that surrounds us. It was one day this fall that I walked out of church and one of our parishioners commented on how beautiful the fall leaves were; and I confess, until that comment, I had not noticed. How often we get so busy rushing from task to task, thinking about the duties of the day, that we don't take time "to smell the roses," or observe the beauty of the leaves. "God, open my eyes to see the wonder of your creation."

Still, perhaps the most amazing wonder of all is that, in the midst of this expanse, in the midst of the billions of stars, in the midst of the billions of people, God cares personally for you and for me. As the psalmist says:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

(Ps. 8:3-4 NRSV)

Friends, I tell you there is joy simply in the wonder, simply in the beauty of creation. But there is still greater joy in the knowledge that the God who created all of this cares for each of us; and cares for us so deeply as to take on human form to walk beside us, to teach us, and to heal us. That's the story of Christmas; and the story of Christmas can be expressed in one word – “Emmanuel” which means “God with us.”

But this Christmas, I suggest that you personalize that word. Instead of thinking of “Emmanuel” as “God with us,” make it personal – “God with me.” I have often told our children that the most wonderful gift in the world is the amazing love of God. That love is personified at Christmas. At Christmas, that love comes in the form of a person, Jesus, born of woman, born that we might come into an ever closer relationship with God. And that gift did not just happen in a stable in Bethlehem two thousand years ago; that gift is re-gifted every Christmas, re-gifted to you and to me.

Our Christmas Hymn – “Silent Night” tells of some lowly shepherds out in the fields suddenly being aware that something very special was happening. And we hear that glory streamed from heaven afar, and heavenly hosts sang “Alleluia.” I don't know what the streaming glory that the shepherds experienced actually looked like; but I know what today's glory is. . . Today's glory comes in the knowledge that Christ is always with us, spiritually walking beside us, leading us, guiding us, loving us. That's our Christmas gift from God – God's very presence in our lives.

Friends, into every life a little rain falls. But Christ is with us in the rain to give us strength, to give us courage, to give us peace. And Christ is with us in the sunshine, to give us warmth, and joy and more peace. And when our days on earth are accomplished, Christ will be with us, to walk beside us, to lead us into eternal glory.

For some, Christmas is a joyful time, a time spent with family, a time sharing love in the exchange of gifts, a time sharing wonderful meals around a family table. For others, Christmas can be a difficult time as we are reminded of the loss of loved ones or the personal difficulties that we may be facing. (To these, I recommend our Blue Christmas Service on Tuesday, December 18th, sponsored by our Stephen Ministers. It's a wonderful, meaningful, peaceful service for all who need a break in the midst of a busy and maybe even a sad Christmas season.)

But today I tell you regardless of your circumstances, there is joy, there is reason to celebrate, because God's glory has shown forth. God has given you, each of you personally the greatest gift in the world. "Christ the Savior is born." Christ *your* Savior is born. You have a personal Savior, a Savior who knows your joys and your sorrows, a Savior who shares your joys and your sorrows, a Savior who is always with you to give you peace, to give you strength, to give you courage, and to give you love. There is no greater gift and there is no greater joy.

And so, it's Advent. It's time once again to prepare anew for the coming of our Savior. It is a time of Joy, for we know the Good News of God's Amazing Love. Joy to the World, Christ the Savior is born. Let us join with the Heavenly hosts singing "Alleluia"! This Christmas let that name, Emmanuel, be our personal name for Jesus. Yes, Christ is with us. Christ is with you, and Christ is with me. Alleluia and Amen.

Let us pray. . .

Holy Lord,
You are our "Emmanuel,"
for you walk with us, everyday of our lives.
We thank you and we praise you for your presence,
the greatest gift the world has ever known.
Amen.

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