



*I Will Honor Christmas in My Heart*

*Luke 2:1-14*

*(Fifth in the Advent sermon series)*

*Christmas Eve ~ Monday, December 24th, 2018*

*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*

*The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.*

*Text: And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (v. 10)*

On that night so very long ago in Bethlehem "Good News", Gospel, was dawning upon not just the few, but the many--the whole world. That was an angel's message.

As the birth of John the Baptist signaled the end of an age, the birth of Mary and Joseph's child announced the beginning of a new one. The angel's message of "good news" originally meant a "victory message from the battlefield" and was used as a technical term in the Roman world as "the birth of the emperor". (M. Eugene Boring & Fred B. Craddock, *The People's New Testament Commentary*, c. 2004)

Luke set the stage for a conflict not only between the emperor and Jesus, but between two world orders, two understandings of Reality. In the birth of Jesus a new reality, a new way of seeing and understanding who God is and our relationship to the Almighty is upon us. There is more to Reality than what we experience, and what we see. There is a greater Reality that overshadows our small lives. There is an Eternal Hand in the mix of life and this world.

This new Reality was first revealed to the shepherds who watched their flock at night but it is continually revealed to each and everyone one of us each moment that we live.

In Charles Dickens' novelette *A Christmas Carol* old Ebenezer Scrooge--the Grinchiest of men with the coldest of hearts--saw the Reality the shepherds witnessed on the night so long ago. In the revealing Light of that Reality he vowed,

"I will keep Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year."

The Eternal Reality that the angel proclaimed, that the shepherds saw in a manger and that Scrooge vowed to keep breaks into each of our lives at the most unexpected moments. This new Reality expunges the old and lets us begin again. In the words of the great apostle,

"If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation for the old has gone and the new has come!" (II Corinthians 5:17) We are reminded of this "newness" in the baptismal font and the communion Table. As the Old Testament book of Lamentations reminds us,

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;  
his mercies never end;  
they are new every morning... (3: 20-23)

As a young man John D. Rockefeller, Sr. drove himself and all of those around him unmercilessly. He wanted to earn as much money as he could. At the age of 33 he earned his first million dollars. By the age of 53 he was declared the richest man in the world. At the time, he was the world's only billionaire. But he was also, perhaps the most hated. As a matter of fact, many were glad--they felt that no one was more deserving of his misfortune than Rockefeller. He was so hated in Pennsylvania that he had to have bodyguards 24 hours a day.

Around that same time he developed alopecia a medical condition that causes one's hair to fall out. He not only lost his hair but his eyebrows and eyelashes. His digestive system was out of whack to the point that he could only digest milk and crackers. He literally became a shrunken man--almost mummy-like. As his health continued to fail, doctors told him that he needed to get his affairs in order as he probably would not live another year.

One sleepless night Rockefeller realized that he truly "couldn't take it with him." He could not take one dime into the Next World. Like Scrooge, and like the rich man in Jesus parable of the rich man and Lazarus, he learned that there is more in life than things.

When he got out of bed the next morning he was a new man, at least mentally. He began to share his wealth with churches. He established a Foundation designed to fund medical research. The more he gave away the better he slept. He ate better and enjoyed life more. There is an iconic picture of his giving a child a coin.

The man that doctors did not believe would live to see his 55th birthday lived to 98. There were two John D. Rockefellers. Now one could argue that the first incarnation made the second possible. But I don't think so. Not is the Gospel is really good news. I believe that he missed a lot of happiness in his life by placing "ladder of success" against the wrong wall. But like the Prodigal Son, the thief on the cross and old Ebenezer Scrooge, he came to his senses before it was too late.

On this Christmas Eve, may we sleep peacefully and awake with a new understanding of what it means to be alive...a child of God...claimed in baptism and fed at His Table. May we, like the shepherds seek the Christ child and find Him. May we, "be not afraid" for we, too, have heard the Good News.

Amen.