

CHRISTMAS PEOPLE

Luke 2: 1-7; 8-20; July 25,2021; Union Congr. United Church of Christ
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Throughout the month of December and throughout the Christian community we hear or read over and over, “Jesus is the reason for the season.”

Jesus *is* the reason for Christmas – and Jesus *is* the reason for our High Holy Season of Advent and the entire season of Christmastide, the twelve days after Christmas until Epiphany. AND for we who call ourselves Christian – and for all who are connected to the progressive Protestant, Christian, United Church of Christ - Jesus is the reason not only for Christmas, but for the entire year!

We are Christmas people whether it is December or any other month in the year. We are people who place our faith and our belief in the human and divine person of Jesus the Christ.

No matter how progressive, no matter how liberal, no matter how not-literal we may be as we profess and interpret and understand the biblical story, we do love to tell and re-enact the Christmas story over and over and over, year after year: marveling in the appearance of angels, the heavenly chorus of angel voices, the fear and trembling of shepherds abiding on the hillsides with their gentle, pastoral sheep, the persistence and presence of the wise ones from the east who finally made it to the place where Mary, Joseph and the special, holy child were – Emmanuel – God with Us – Prince of Peace – Jesus the Christ is born! Alleluia! Gloria in Excelsus Deo!

And yet, we progressive Christians also hurry to remind ourselves and others, that while we don’t know the entire or exact Truth of the story, we know that it may have happened something like this. And we know that in the telling and re-telling, in the pageantry and glorious choral renditions, there is a profound Truth about who Jesus is, and who God is, and what God does, and how God interacts with us and this earth and universe we call our home.

We are Christmas people. Most of us love all the trappings of Christmas – all the parts that probably – in actuality – have nothing much at all to do with Christian Christmas.

And when we are honest, we realize that many of our favorite parts – the Songs and Santa Clause and Ho Ho Ho!, the Christmas trees and tinsel and ornaments, the garlands and gifts, the candles and Christmas lights and many ‘It’s Beginning to Look a Lot like Christmas’ concerts - often have little or nothing to do with “Jesus is the reason for the season.” And we also know, don’t we, that so much of what we have wrapped into our ‘most wonderful time of the year’ are rituals and trappings from non – Christian traditions that have re-imagined and re-invented and appropriated into Christian tradition.

Early this week, as I walked through the vestry to where our Liturgical Arts team was busy hanging wreaths, placing a little tree sparking with lights, setting up the Nativity scene on the chancel, and placing decorative gift packages in the bell tower – even though I know it is the end of July and the temperature is hovering in the upper 80’s, I couldn’t help but burst into, “It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas!”

Because we are Christmas people. We are Christ’s people. And we do ‘Need a little Christmas’. It is – at least one of – ‘The most wonderful time(s) of the year’. Christmas is a time we remember that God chose to be with us – humanity - by becoming one with us – like us - a tiny, tender baby – to teach us- to walk with us – to grow with us – to challenge us – to invite us – to chastise us – to heal us – to love us – to break barriers with us – to confront the empire with us – to push edges with and for us – to love us. Christmas is a time when we become super/hyper aware of the importance of being together – of sharing love together – of the gift of God’s presence and love with and for us in the midst of community.

Christmas is our story. It is not only our story once a year – but every day of the year – all the time. It is the magical story that we cannot quite make sense of without logical, scientific, need-proof, minds – and yet – it is a magical, mystical story that cannot fail to inspire us, to make us shiver with goosebumps of delight and wonder. It does not fail year after year to re-tell and re-enact the story seeking to bring new life and new meaning to the amazing news that God is with us – God is here – God is now – Peace on Earth and Goodwill toward all. ‘Joy to the World! The Lord is Come! Let earth its praises bring! Let every heart prepare Christ room And heaven and nature sing! Joyous Christmas (in July) everyone!