

"The Nourishment of Christmas"

Do you remember every time you have partaken of Holy Communion? Do you remember every Sunday School lesson you ever sat through - or taught? Do you remember every time somebody was kind to you – or you were kind to another person?

Do you remember every time you got ready for Christmas, everything you did each year?

Do you remember every sermon you have heard preached in this sanctuary?

Do you remember everything that was done for you as you were growing up?

Life is a strange commodity. Hind sight is often better than foresight. Parents with growing children who do not get their family involved in the life of the Church –or some spiritual training, may only realize later that they wish they had done so.

The Church is like a family; hopefully it is growing and maturing. And becoming more of what it was meant to be. This usually happens, even though it is hard to put a finger on the very moment our priorities changed. But when we look back, hopefully something has happened.

The man whose wife cooked him over 32,000 meals – over a period of 30 years – realizes something has transpired. Something very important, even though he cannot remember each specific meal - 32,850 of them! His body and spirit have been nourished. He writes, "I have

received nourishment from every single one of them.”

Usually, you don't walk in church for one hour and walk out a devoted Christian or do the same in a synagogue and walk out a devoted Jew!

We human beings are complex beings. It takes time for most of us human beings to change; to turn from our human self-centered ways to the loving ways of our Creator.

And even when we turn to God – to ask for his forgiveness and salvation, it doesn't usually take too long to get mislead, or fall backward again.

The man who wrote the editorial in the British Weekly had, he figured, heard 3000 sermons but could not remember a single one.

The real question is: Had those 3000 sermons helped to shape his daily life? THAT is the question! And, he might not even realize this had happened, though it had!

I was reading an article about Helen Hayes, the actress, and she suggested that evil things are loud; good things are often very quiet!

The fruit of the Spirit is *very* quiet. In his Letter to the churches – the people of Galatia, Paul the apostle writes, “The fruit of the Spirit (of God) is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

(Galatians 5:22) Paul writes, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (verse 25)

Christsmas is Christ’s Mass. It is the celebration of the birth of Jesus, the Son of God. If we, during this Christsmas holiday (Holy Day) celebrate what it really is, that is good. If we make the Christmas season anything we want to make it, that is not so good.

The spiritual nourishment comes from the Christ Event. It will matter what we think and do in this season- for the nourishment of our earthly journey.

In the gospel of Luke, “The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and be called Son of the Most High.’”

(Luke 1: 30-32)

Joseph is told, "Mary will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because he will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

This is the meaning of Christmas! Our nourishment comes from sticking to its meaning! This is the REAL gift of Christmas, and we offer gifts to each other in thanksgiving for the Supreme Gift from God Almighty –His Son as our Saviour.....who comes to us as an innocent Baby. It would be wise to think about giving some gifts, to children and adults which would provide a connection between the gift and the purpose of the Holy Day!

We would probably agree that Christmas has become quite secularized in our society. The purpose of it is *not* to see how much profit each store can make during the Christmas season; the purpose is to enlighten the people of the world about the Messiah Who has come and what that Event can mean in a person or family's life. Or the everyday life of a community, country, *or* this broken world. When that Christmas baby grew up

^{He} he was heard to say, "I ^WHave come that you may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

In John 1 we hear, "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him.....To all who received Him, to those who believed in His Name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

What can any of us do to come close to the Christ Child and Christmas? Some easy avenues:

We can look at a ^{baby}child and ponder the arrival of the baby Jesus in Bethlehem, with mother Mary and father Joseph. We can share this scene and story with particular children; and children of God of all ages. Dwell more on the Event than the giving of expensive gifts.

We can attend worship services in a place of Worship which is decorated for the Advent of the Christ Child. Listen to the whole service, like it is your first time attending! Attend another place of

worship where you have never been. (You will not take it all for granted!) Listen to the words of the prayers and the hymns, as the people, including you, pray and sing:

Ponder this Polish carol, in our Presbyterian hymnbook c.1955, paraphrased by Edith M. G. Reed. The harmony is by David Hugh Jones, who was in charge of music when I was at Princeton Seminary.

“Infant holy, Infant lowly, For His bed a cradle stall;
Oxen lowing, Little knowing Christ the Babe is Lord of all.

Swift are winging Angels singing, Noels ringing,
Tidings bringing: Christ the Babe is Lord of All.

Flocks were sleeping; Shepherds keeping Vigil till
the morning new

Saw the glory, Heard the story, Tidings of a gospel
true.

Thus rejoicing, Free from sorrow, Praises voicing

Greet the morrow: Christ the Babe was born for you."

(Presbyterian Hymnbook) - The Hymnbook, 1955.

Get an Advent calendar, and use it each day, especially with children.

Think about who in your community needs a visit!

It can be someone in their home, or in a retirement or nursing home. Or even a friend of yours with whom you would like to share the Christmas season.

TALK to children about the meaning of Christmas.

Don't leave this for everybody else to do!

Children will learn only if someone teaches them.

And, perhaps adults also. And teach the child to go visit a person, and perhaps take a meaningful gift! Reach out to the needy in the name of the Christ Child.

Our Creator said, "I will be your God and you will be MY people."

Edwin Hatch wrote in 1886, "Breathe on me, Breathe of God, Fill me with life anew, That I may love what Thou dost love, And do what Thou wouldst do." (The Hymnbook, c. 1955, Presbyterian Church)

Invite a person,
or family for
a meal. Maybe
once a week -
during Advent.
Share the love
& joy of the
Christ Child
Event.

God entered human life and then He gave it up –
 for our sake. So that we could come to this
 Church and this Communion Table, and He would
 welcome us with open arms, as His Beloved
 Children. And the ONE WHO CAME on
 CHRISTMAS could and would forgive sins *ours*
when we ask.

It's not important that the man at the beginning
 of this sermon (in the news article) remembers
 the words or message of 3000 sermons. What is
 vital is: has he learned that Jesus lived for him
 and died for him?

Has he come to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour in
 his own life. Did he get the nourishment intended
 in all those sermons?

"Upon HIM was the chastisement that made us
 whole, and with His stripes we are HEALED." THIS
 is the meaning of Christmas, and Easter, and the
 whole of the Christian Faith.

The real gift of Christmas , the Son of God

Never changes, never wears out, never has to be
 exchanged or returned; it always fits! Take the
 Gift of Christmas into the New Year! Amen.

1985 — Rev. Elaine Peck Africa