

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

December 24, 2023 – CHRISTMAS EVE, YR. B

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*Faith, Hope, and Love*”

Isaiah 9:2-7 (Those who walked in darkness will see light; Messiah will come!)
Psalm 96 (Sing to the Lord a new song; honor, praise, and worship Him)
Titus 2:11-14 (God's grace appeared in Christ, bringing salvation)
St. Luke 2:1-18 (Jesus is born as angels proclaim peace on earth)

Wally was big for his age—seven years old. Everyone wondered what role the teacher would assign him in the annual Christmas play, especially since he was a slow learner. Perhaps he could pull the curtain. To everyone's surprise the teacher gave Wally the role of the innkeeper. Of course, the boy was delighted. After all, he only had to learn one line: “There is no room in the inn.” He had that down in no time.

Then came the night for the program. The parents took their places. Every seat in the auditorium was filled. The children entered singing “Oh come all ye faithful.” The lights dimmed. A hush swept over the audience. The curtain opened on Scene One. Mary and Joseph entered the stage and walked up to the door of the inn. “Please sir, my wife is about to have a baby. Could we have a room for the night?” Wally was ready for his line. He had rehearsed it all day. “There is...” he hesitated. Then started over. “There is...” Again, his mind went completely blank. Everyone was embarrassed for him. Poor Wally just didn't know what to do.

Joseph thought he would improvise and began walking away from the stable. Seeing him leave, in desperation Wally called out: “Look, there's plenty of room at my house, just c'mon home with me!” *

Inadvertently, little Wally had just uttered a profound theological truth. God came to earth in the Person of His Son Jesus, so that we *could* take Him home with us! When we believe in, and get to know Jesus Christ, He makes His home in our hearts, minds, and lives. As a result, we become transformed into better people who are headed for heaven. We also gain the supreme benefit of *total forgiveness* whenever we mess up, which, for most of us is daily.

Every other religion worships a God in paradise or some supernatural state. But only in our Judeo-Christian religion does the Creator of the Universe come among us as the Messiah, a Hebrew word meaning “God's anointed One” who would save Israel. In fact, Jesus did come as the Savior of *all* the world—but not to deliver us from earthly oppression, for that will ultimately pass away. He came to save us from sin, death, and hell—those oppressors of our *souls* which have implications for eternity.

But there is so much more to God coming amongst us as a child at Bethlehem. He came to bring all humankind *faith, hope, and love*—which St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:13 are among the greatest of God's gifts to us. And, it turns out, faith, hope, and love are all interconnected. We cannot truly have one without the other. It's a triple package deal.

What does the Bible say faith is? In Hebrews 11:1 (BSB) we read: “faith is the assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see.” Jesus Christ's promises of salvation and eternal life are not something we can see, hear, touch, or prove. Yet we can be certain of this reality because of God's great *love* for us. God didn't need us because God doesn't need *anything*. He came to be with us—and to become *one of us!*—because He *loves* us. Made in God's image, we understand wanting to be with people we love.

And, we find that in Christ, love and hope are tied together. Romans 5:5 (NLT) tells us: “hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us [his] Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.”

In today’s world, and in our individual lives, we so desperately need faith, hope, and love. We may believe we have faith, yet we lack hope, or else we don’t feel sufficiently loved. Perhaps we have difficulty loving others. When we are weak in any of these three areas, Jesus can help.

Christ came so that our faith, hope, and love might not rest on, or be determined by, our own thoughts and fears, or the challenging—and often discouraging—world we live in. Long, long ago, the Lord said to the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah (29:11),

“For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to give you hope and a future.” This is the same promise God makes to us with the coming of Christ: *Hope and a future*. *Hope* in this present time—regardless of what is going on inside or around us—and *a future* of eternal life with God in heaven.

We nourish and nurture our faith, hope, and love by keeping Christ in our hearts, minds, and lives—not just at Christmas, but every day. We do this by feeding ourselves with God’s Word; going to church; being with other Christians; not exposing ourselves to media input that contradicts our faith and brings us down; and by helping people in need—folks like Jesus and His earthly parents on that Christmas night.

And, in case we forget that Christ came to be with us *always*, perhaps we should, along with little Wally, say to Jesus *daily*: “There’s plenty of room at my house, just c’mon home with me!” *Amen*.