

## **You've Just Been Proselytized**

Christmas Eve 2019: Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:1-20

The Reverend Paul D. Allick, the Church of the Advent, Dec 24, 2019

On the evening of St. Nicholas Day, Keith and I were wandering around Union Square looking at lights. As we headed for the Muni, Keith pointed out a man with an electric megaphone. We both groaned, "A proselytizer."

But just as quickly as the groan came, it hit me, "What I am judging him for? That is what Christians are supposed to do: spread the news!" Keith agreed and we laughed at the irony of a priest being put off by an evangelist telling Christmas shoppers about Jesus.

And then I listened to the preacher. He spoke very calmly. He wasn't yelling threats. He was saying, "God made you for a purpose. There is a reason you are alive." Two other men were respectfully handing out pamphlets.

I assumed a judgmental message. Turns out I am the one filled with judgementalism making all kinds of assumptions about other Christians.

In our Baptismal Vows we promised to "proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ." Every baptized person here tonight made an oath to preach the Gospel in word and deed. And those who prefer deeds still have to in some way share Jesus with the recipients.

It can't be like the joke, "What do you get when you mix an Episcopalian with a Jehovah Witness? Someone who knocks on your door for no apparent reason."

So, what is the message we preach? How do we convert others to the Way of Jesus?

Now hold on Fr. Paul, this is Christmas Eve. This is not the time to be preaching. We have guests!

This is the perfect time to share the message of Jesus. It's his birthday. It's the Day God became human! No matter how effectively our culture has turned this into a cozy season of abstract peace and joy, this is the day the door of salvation was thrown wide open! The heavens were torn open and God came to live with us. And not just *with* us, but to *be* one of us.

This story we read each year from Luke, just like the season, has become so romanticized that it loses its punch.

Here we have a couple living under a scandal. And just as Mary is about ready to have the baby in question, a government regulation intrudes. Joseph is required by law to report for the census. And no, he cannot do it from home he has to return to his ancestral city.

When they arrive, exhausted and irritable, there are no more hotel rooms! They end up staying in the garage-like place where the animals sleep. This wasn't unusual. Travelers did this all the time when the rooms were full. Not unusual but very uncomfortable and annoying.

And once the Word of God, the Logos, the logic and wisdom of all creation is born and laid in a feeding trough, who do the Angels report to? The clergy? The palace? Nope. They announce the Good News to rough and tumble shepherds.

Like so many who do all of the hard work for the rest of us, shepherds were looked down upon. But when The Allegorical Shepherd is born it does seem fitting for the real shepherds to be the first to hear the Good News.

The way in which the Creator of the Universe begins his journey as one of us, gives me hope. It means that as you and I walk through the many trials of being human we are right in the bosom of God's love.

We have been made right with God. And it began with the cry of messy newborn lying in a feeding trough with bands of cloth, hay and the breath of livestock to keep him warm.

I took one of those pamphlets offered by our proselytizers. The cover reads, "Questions. Who am I? Why am I here? Is there a God? What will happen to me after I die?"

Paul's Letter to Titus answered those questions tonight, "when God's kindness and love appeared, he saved us, not because of the correct things we had done. He did it through the water of new birth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit. Now that we have been made right by his grace freely given to us, we can look forward to eternal life." (paraphrased from the NRSV and the CEB)

This news is good enough to share everywhere everyday as much as we can.

We are going to need a shipment of electric megaphones with Advent's logo on the side.