

WE'VE A STORY TO TELL
Rev. Gregory Flint
Luke 3: 1 – 6
December 6, 2009
(Second Sunday of Advent)

And so we gathered the children on the chancel this morning to tell them the beginning of a story.

It is the Story of the Advent, the Coming, prophesied from of old, of the Messiah, God's Anointed One, the Christ, the Divine Word enfleshed, who for Christians is Jesus.

And midst all the distractions and diversions of these coming weeks, as Christians we have one primary task – to be the stewards, the trustees and tellers of that Story.

It is our Advent calling to share and sing the Story, pray it, teach it, act it out, live with it and into it...making sure our children hear it, see it, know it, come to love it too...so that they become its future trustees, who will in their turn pass the Story on to their children.

And we must not be fooled by all the other distractions of this season. It is the Story that matters most these weeks. It is our real Advent treasure as Christians.

For in this time of so many dehumanizing, soul-wounding, hope-killing, untrue stories, the best Christmas gift we have to give is our stewardship of this Story of stories...of the Coming of Jesus.

And I have again been asked, as I am every year, about the historicity, the factualness of it all. After all, who knows what really happened when Jesus was born?
And are we telling our children something untrue?

And I answered again this year that though the facts of Jesus' birth are not historically known, that doesn't make the Nativity Story untrue. Indeed, for me the Story we tell these weeks is as true as anything I've ever heard.

For the truth of the matter, for me, is that every year this Sacred Story has a way of healing those places inside me rubbed raw by the world. I hear this Story retold and I dare to believe in the power of love again and I feel hopeful once more.

You see, this Story we retell these Advent weeks is not literally, fact for fact true. Rather, it is profoundly true. For this Story, like no other, plunges us deep into the mystery and mercies and Being of God. Because of this Story we know again who we are – beloved of God....

This Sacred Story we retell really begins in the heart of God, but unfolds first in the lives of two women. There is a wise elder Elizabeth, who is miraculously pregnant. And there is Elizabeth's young niece Mary, also pregnant.

And there is the womb-bearing mystery they share: that Elizabeth's child John will be the Baptist, the prophet who announces that Mary's grown-up child Jesus is the Awaited One, through whom God will bring to be a new realm of love on earth.

And sure, no one knows the biographical facts about these two women. But are the facts the most important thing? And aren't most of the facts you've learned in your life either outdated or forgotten? And have you ever found the meaning and purpose of your life in a fact?

But a sacred story...well, a sacred story is timeless in its truth-telling. Our sacred stories hold us together: body and soul; one to another; ourselves with all creation; our being and God's. Through the lens of sacred story we look out at the world, or into the heavens, or into the mirror, and know that the universe is not just a matter of the random interactions of molecules, and that our lives have a place in a greater scheme and purpose of love.

And so we do tell it again, the Story of Elizabeth and Zechariah, who beckon us into this Holy Advent Vigil. And of the young peasant woman named Mary, probably yet a teenager, who is told in a vision that she will bear a child who will be Emmanuel – the One who is so God filled as to be God with us.

And each week the story unfolds: with Joseph who does the right thing; and then there's Caesar's proclamation; and the journey to Bethlehem; the birth in a stable; a baby lying in a manger; angels singing and shepherds come to see; a new star in the heavens and strange visitors coming from afar.

But hear me: I take this Story too seriously to ever literalize it. And I stake my very soul on the truth of it...

For the truth is, this Story has opened my heart and causes me to believe with all my heart that things can be transformed: that crooked paths in this world can be made straight, and rough places smoothed, and a new way found, just like John the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah promises.

That swords can be hammered into ploughshares, and the dispossessed and hungry can have what they too need, that the outcast and lonely can find welcome, maybe even among us...and that you and I are called by God to participate in God's healing of the world.

We are a people of that storied truth. And this world so needs the Advent Story we tell here.

For there are so many untrue stories thrust at us and at our children: loud stories promising that real happiness is having more of everything; political and blogged stories about who is on our side and who we should fear; stories that promise that real security is the right investment or a bigger defense budget; and television, movie, and videogame stories in which characters brutalize one another and it's called entertainment.

There are even untrue stories, told about these holiday weeks: that the perfect Christmas is a matter of getting everything on the list done, or having the perfect family gathering, or that Christmas meaning comes wrapped with a big bow.

But these are the real fictions. And we know it, even as we sense that we should pay close attention to the Story we retell here these weeks. For this Story is not a seasonal decoration or just for the children. We are all – adult and child alike – saved from the destructive, hope killing, untrue fictions of the world by this true Story: of Elizabeth and Zechariah; of Gabriel, the angelic messenger; of Mary, who sings, "Let it be with me according to God's word"; of Joseph, an unlikely partner in God's plan; of shepherds, social outcasts, to whom the mystery is revealed; and of star-touched visitors who come proclaiming that this Child is Christ – God-bearer to the world.

And this Story we have to tell will again draw us deep into something mysterious and wonderful and timeless. So in these Advent weeks, if you and I listen closely, if we lean into the Story, wide-eyed with the children...we will find something so true.

For this Story given us to retell comes from the very heart of God.