

Xmas Eve, 2023
December 24, 2023, 5 p.m.

The Very Rev. Jeanette M. Repp
St. Peter's, San Pedro

MERRY CHRISTMAS! MERRY CHRISTMAS!

IT'S GOOD TO BE WITH YOU THIS EVENING
ON THIS VERY SPECIAL DAY.

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ONE OF MY FAVORITE MOVIES THIS LAST YEAR,
AND YET THAT WAS ALSO KIND OF UNSETTLING,
WAS EVERYTHING, EVERYWHERE, ALL AT ONCE.
DID YOU SEE IT?

IT'S AN ODD GENRE
THAT'S BECOME POPULAR OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS,
ONE IN WHICH THE HEROES, ANTI-HEROES, VILLIANS, ETC.,
EXIST IN A 'MULTI-VERSE' –
A REALITY THAT IS ACTUALLY MULTIPLE INTERSECTED UNIVERSES.

IN THESE FILMS LIKE *EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE,*
AND SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY OUT, AND MANY OTHERS,
WE FIND OUR CHARACTERS SHIFTING
BETWEEN A MULTITUDE OF INTER-CONNECTED REALITIES.

SOUND ODD?

IT IS, AND YET I FIND IT ALL VERY INTRIGUING,
ESPECIALLY IN THE WAY THAT IT DEMANDS THAT I CONSIDER
THE COMPLEXITY OF OUR UNIVERSE.

PERHAPS OUR REALITY *IS THAT MULTI-FACETED !?!*

WHAT IF WE DO EXIST ON THOUSANDS OF ALTERNATE TIMELINES,
FEATURING THOUSANDS OF ALTERNATE VERSIONS OF OURSELVES.

* * * * *

BUT BACK TO WHY WE'RE HERE TODAY.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

TWO OF MY FAVORITE WORDS,
IN THIS MY FAVORITE SEASON. . .

A WORD OF JOY, *MERRY,*

AND ANOTHER MEANING A '*MASS (OR SERVICE) FOR CHRIST!*'

NOW, OF COURSE, I COULD ALSO SAY –

'HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JESUS!

A BIT HALLMARK-Y, BUT ACCURATE.

AND YET I ACTUALLY PREFER SOMETHING LIKE –

"A PEACEFUL TIME OF JOYFUL WORSHIP

HONORING GOD AND OUR MESSIAH,"

OR MORE SIMPLY PUT - *"MERRY CHRISTMAS!"*

JOYFUL INDEED!

HOWEVER YOU SUM IT UP,

I LOVE HAVING SO MANY GATHERED,

IN THIS STUNNING SPACE, WITH THIS BEAUTIFUL MUSIC,

TO CELEBRATE THIS MOST HOLY DAY.

*

AND YET, IN AS MUCH AS CHRISTMAS IS A JOYFUL TIME,
IT'S ALSO ABOUT SO MUCH MORE
THAN OUR GATHERING HERE THIS EVENING.

AND IT'S SO MUCH MORE EVEN
THAN THE GATHERINGS OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS
THAT SOME HAD EARLIER TODAY,
AND OTHERS WILL HAVE THIS EVENING AND TOMORROW.

IT'S ABOUT SO MUCH MORE. . .

MORE THAN THIS,

MORE THAN THE ~2 BILLION WORLDWIDE
CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS THIS WEEKEND.

AND MORE EVEN THAN THAT FIRST CHRISTMAS IN BETHELEHEM,
OVER 2,000 YEARS AGO. . .

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YES, YOU MIGHT SAY –

THIS CELEBRATING IS AMAZING,

ESPECIALLY GIVEN THAT IT HAS BEEN GOING ON

FOR SOME 2000 YEARS,

BEGINNING WITH WHEN MARY GAVE BIRTH TO JESUS.

THAT'S WHAT WE CELEBRATE TODAY, RIGHT?

YES, AND YET,

DIDN'T IT REALLY BEGIN BEFORE THAT?

WASN'T IT ACTUALLY WITH

THE ANGEL GABRIEL'S ANNOUNCEMENT TO MARY,
THAT WE HEARD IN THIS MORNING'S GOSPEL? . . .

HMMM, PERHAPS...

AND YET, DIDN'T IT ESSENTIALLY BEGIN BEFORE THAT?

REMEMBER THE READINGS FROM ISAIAH

THAT WE'VE BEEN HEARING ALL MONTH?

See, the Lord GOD comes with might ...

...He will feed his flock like a shepherd;

he will gather the lambs in his arms...

For a child has been born for us,

a son given to us;

authority rests upon his shoulders,

and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

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LOVELY! AND YET, REALLY,

I THINK IT BEGAN EVEN BEFORE THAT. . .

AS WE'LL HEAR NEXT SUNDAY FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

IN POINT OF FACT,

CHRISTMAS BEGAN WITH *THE WORD*:

I QUOTE - *In the beginning was the Word,*

and the Word was with God,

and the Word was God. . .

All things came into being through him ...

and the life was the light of all people.

The true light, which enlightens everyone,

was coming into the world...

And the Word became flesh

and lived among us."

(SLOW)

YES, THIS DAY, THIS EVENT, THIS CHRISTMAS,
ACTUALLY BEGAN AT THE VERY, *VERY* BEGINNING,
WITH THE FIRST INBREAKING
OF THE DIVINE INTO OUR UNIVERSE.

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IF YOU LOOK AT THE COVER OF YOUR BULLETIN,
YOU'LL SEE A PHOTO OF *THE PHANTOM GALAXY*,
AND THAT'S WHAT I HAD IN MIND
WHEN I CHOSE THAT FOR OUR COVER.

SO MUCH OF THE POWER OF THIS DAY
IS IN GATHERINGS SUCH AS THESE,
AND YET A FAR GREATER MEASURE
COMES FROM THIS THREAD THAT RUNS
BACK THRU, AND EVEN BEYOND, THE HISTORY OF OUR FAITH,
AND, INDEED, OTHER FAITHS, AS WELL,
THAT UNDERSTAND THAT THE BENEVOLENT DIVINE
HAS PERMEATED OUR WORLD

SINCE THE VERY BEGINNING.

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SO, AGAIN, TAKE A LOOK AT THAT PHOTO.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

IT WAS TAKEN LAST YEAR BY THE WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE.

LAUNCHED INTO ORBIT IN DECEMBER 2021.

THE WEBB NOW SITS ABOUT A MILLION MILES AWAY FROM EARTH,

(THAT'S 4 TIMES THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US AND THE MOON),

AND IT TAKES PHOTOS OF GALAXIES LIKE *PHANTOM*

OVER 200 QUINTILLION MILES AWAY,

THAT SHOW US WHAT THE UNIVERSE WAS LIKE

IN THE BEGINNING. . .

IN THE BEGINNING,

WHEN THERE WAS A NOTHING BUT A NOTHING-NESS

THAT OUR HUMAN MINDS CANNOT FATHOM,

UNTIL SUDDENLY THERE WAS SOMETHING,

OR SHOULD I SAY,

SUDDENLY THERE WAS EVERYTHING,

EVERYTHING, EVERYWHERE, ALL AT ONCE . . .

BANG!

THE DIVINE, EVERYWHERE ... ALL AT ONCE.

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AT CHRISTMAS, WE OFTEN SPEAK OF

THE INCREDIBLE INTIMACY THAT WE HAVE WITH GOD

IN JESUS.

THIS DIVINE CHRIST AS THE INFANT JESUS.

THE DIVINE AS HUMAN,

KNOWING WHAT IT IS TO BE HUNGRY

AND BE FED,

KNOWING WHAT IT IS TO BE SCARED,

AND FIND COMFORT,

KNOWING WHAT IT IS TO BE LONELY,

AND FIND LOVE,

IS JUST LIKE YOU AND ME,

AND THAT IS THE MOST INCREDIBLE GIFT!

AND YET, IT IS ALSO VITAL TO REMEMBER

THAT THIS JESUS WE BELIEVE IS ALSO *GOD*:

GOD ALMIGHTY,

THE CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.

WHAT AN AMAZING PART OF OUR FAITH,

THAT THIS FAMILIARITY THAT WE SHARE WITH JESUS,

IS IN TURN WHAT WE SHARE WITH THE GOD

THAT CREATED EVERYTHING,

INCLUDING THIS *PHANTOM GALAXY*,

WITH ITS 100 BILLION STARS!

(PAUSE)

AND YET,

THIS GALACTIC MIND-BOGGLING SIDE OF OUR GOD,

IS LIKEWISE AND SIMPLY

A PART OF THIS MOMENT IN TIME,

THAT WE HONOR TODAY HERE AT ST. PETER'S . . .

IN ALL THAT WE SAY IN DO,

IN EVERYTHING, EVERYWHERE, ALL AT ONCE.

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IT'S INCREDIBLE REALLY!

I LOVE THIS STUFF,

THIS MIND AND HEART-STRETCHING STUFF!

AND YET, THAT'S THE POINT,

TO BE STRETCHED OPEN IN SOME WAY THIS DAY,

EVEN AS GOD WAS,

AND TO REMEMBER THAT OURS IS A GOD

THAT CREATED EVERYTHING FROM NOTHING,

14 BILLION YEARS AGO,

AND OURS IS A GOD OF THE INFANT JESUS TODAY.

JUST AS OURS IS A GOD OF WONDER & BEAUTY,

AND OURS A GOD OF JUSTICE.

(SALT)

JUST AS OURS IS A GOD OF THE COSMOS,

AND OURS IS A GOD OF THIS SIMPLE BELOVED COMMUNITY,

AS WE GATHER TO WORSHIP THE LORD
IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS.

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IN CLOSING THIS EVENING,

I'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU A POEM

BY AUTHOR, THEOLOGIAN, EDUCATOR, AND CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER

HOWARD THURMAN.

"Christmas is a mood, a quality, a symbol.

It is never merely a fact.

As a fact,

it is a date on the calendar —

to the believer

it is the anniversary of an event in human history.

An individual may relate (themselves)

meaningfully to the fact or the event,

but that would not be Christmas.

The mood of Christmas —

what is it?

It is a quickening of the presence

of other human beings

into whose lives a precious part of one's own

has been released.

It is a memory of other days

when into one's path an angel appeared

spreading a halo over an ordinary moment

or a commonplace event.

It is an iridescence of sheer delight

that bathes one's whole being

with something more wonderful

than words can ever tell.

Of such is the mood of Christmas.

(The Growing Edge, Jerell Gantt)

AMEN.