



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora  
December 25 2023 - Christmas Eve  
Canon Paul Walker

Christmas Eve always conjures up powerful memories. There are such significant associations from our childhood with our parents and grand-parents of Christmas traditions of music, food and decorations. It is a holiday fraught with sentimental dangers of nostalgia, indulgences of over-eating and spending and a myriad competing and unspoken expectations that can, if left unchecked, become a burden and source of resentment.

But you have chosen to gather in a church on this holy night, to be with people who may not know, to celebrate the event of the birth of someone we understand to be a Saviour.

Whatever brings you to this gathering tonight it's important to acknowledge that this is the first time we've been able to gather like this since 2019. Three years of pandemic restrictions were followed by a snow blizzard last year which closed all the county roads around us.

Christmas becomes for many of us a marker of time. We measure time by using Christmas as a reference point. That was our first Christmas since Covid; or the first Christmas in our home; or the first Christmas without Mom.

Time is a funny thing, but Christmas becomes an important marker of the passage of time.

We sing carols, read ancient texts, and offer our prayers in this sacred and beautiful space to be reminded of the angel's message, to rejoice with the shepherds - the ones who first received that message of great joy - and to pray for peace in the world.

St. John the Evangelist describes this event as an eternal Word that breaks into time like no other. It was a Word that could not be contained and it finally burst forth from its heavenly throne towards its goal of being manifest and fulfilled on earth. It was a powerful Word that spoke a universe in being, spoke freedom to the captive, sight to the blind, cleansing to the leper, and life to the dead.

There was not a crevice of the earth that did not hear this Word which was like a light that went everywhere to display the glory of Almighty God. It descended to the depths of suffering; it went to the war torn corners of the Roman empire; and even to most unexpected place of all, the depths of hell.

This Word, like no other, was a gracious and decisive Word that brought the glory of God into the places where it was thought God was most absent - all to accomplish what it did at the beginning: breathe new life and dispel the mighty to restore the focus on the Almighty.

So when it showed up in Samaria, where there were lepers who could not come in to town, there was restoration of community.

When it came to a wedding in Cana where there was no more wine, there was an abundance of the best wine. When it came to the wilderness where there was only five loaves and two fish, there was enough for thousands of hungry people. When it came to Bethany where Mary and Martha mourned the death of their brother, there was resurrection.

What was contained in this holy infant was something that we could never invent or create.

This Word is what Elizabeth and Mary and the shepherds first heard about from the angels. It is what the woman at the well heard about; the paralytic at the pool of Siloam heard about; what Andrew and Philip and James heard about; what Mary Magdalene heard about; what Matthew and Thomas heard about; and in listening to all of *their* testimony, it is now what we hear about.

It is an eternal word of pure Love that breaks into a particular moment in time to overcome our fears and anxieties, and invite us into a place where there is a banquet of abundance, where there is a freedom to be without judgement, and where there is what we all long for in our world, an everlasting peace between hostile nations.

This Word made flesh would embody the frailty and uncertainty of our human experience, and then have the unique ability to create something that we could never imagine. A new kingdom. A new creation.

That's why this Word becomes the reference point for time. That's why after four years we still come back to gather tonight in this space.

Because we long for a kingdom where power is relinquished to establish a peace that knows no bounds. We long for a place where we are not condemned. We long for a place where we can belong to one another safely. We long for love.

And so we come with burdened hearts, preoccupied minds and tired bodies to be refreshed, renewed and restored. Because we have all received grace upon grace; and whether we are aware of it or not, we find ourselves belonging as citizens to a great and glorious kingdom where all our ancestors are with us to applaud us, cheer us on, and guide us, and where not one thing or one person in all creation is lost. Not one.

So we rejoice and give thanks for the birth of a Saviour, the anointed one, the Messiah, Christ the Lord, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all time. And like the shepherds we go from this place with haste to tell others about all we have seen and heard.