

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

1 Christmas
December 31, 2006
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Seven Ways to Jesus!”

For over one thousand years, at every Eucharist there would be a second Gospel recited after the Communion and before the final blessing. That Gospel unlike the first Gospel was always the same Sunday after Sunday. It was the Gospel of John and it was the beginning, the first eighteen versus of that Gospel.

“In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came through him and without him not one thing came into being. In him was life and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness grasps it not.”

Even as a child I think those words always gave me goose bumps. Even then, we all knew that ‘the word,’ ‘the logos,’ did not refer to scripture or the words in the bible, but referred to the ‘Eternal Christ.’

Long before *Star Wars*, long before *Star Trek*, and certainly long before Carl Sagan invited us to journey with him across space in *Cosmos*, I imagined the Universe void of all life and light, till the voice of God split the darkness and gave birth to being.

Who, we may ask was he talking to? God has no need of speaking; he can communicate just with thought. Yet, God speaks, he speaks to his son and that dialogue explodes, to fill the darkness and bring all things into being.

This play on light and darkness runs throughout John’s Gospel and it serves to illustrate the war between good and evil, knowledge and ignorance. We all know that contrast exists still in our world today.

The word of God comes to each one of us to guide us through darkness towards the light of God’s love. In the Old Testament, God spoke to his people and tried to guide them with his law. The story of Israel’s prophets, tell us that the law was not successful in bringing people to God.

God brings each one of us to salvation, through the introduction of Christ in our life. Martin Luther spent the early years of his priestly life, wondering how someone with his faults could ever find God and the way to salvation. He found the answer around 1515 in the words of St Paul. He knew that he could be saved through faith in Jesus Christ the Son, Christ the man who showed the way through pain and death became for him a guiding light.

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

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As we stand at the beginning of another New Year, it is good to look ahead towards where we are going. Where we are going; what are our plans; what we will do in the coming year can and should be summed up two words: "Jesus Christ."

Jesus Christ is our focus, Jesus Christ is our way ahead, and Jesus Christ is our reason for being here. "In the beginning was the word..." says John's Gospel. And we can read that as "In the beginning was Jesus Christ." Before one stone was laid upon a stone in this church, there was Jesus Christ. He was central to the ones who built and founded the parish. He should be central to us also. Take Christ out of our world and the world becomes a very dark place.

So what are you going to do this year? What are your New Years resolutions for 2007? Are we going to repeat last years resolves to lose weight, exercise more, pray more and take more time off work? Or would we decide to think totally outside the box and choose 7 resolutions that Jesus would set himself.

If we resolved this New Years Day to adopt 7 resolutions that Jesus himself would choose, how successful would we be? Let us take a look:

In Matthew 17:20: Christ says: "If you had faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there and it will move.' Nothing would be impossible for you."

Have you a mountain in your life that you would like to move? Have you something yet to achieve? Have you not got the faith of a mustard seed, for Christ is saying "Have you no faith in me?"

There is your first resolution: "Have faith."

In Matthew 18:5 Jesus says: "Who ever welcomes a little child like this in my name, welcomes me." Can you save one child this year? It isn't as hard as you think, but you have to think. Resolve to save a child. If you want to know how, come ask Linda. She has a list." Our second resolution: "Save a child."

Again in 18:20 Jesus proclaims: "Where two or three come together in my name, there I will be in your midst."

(People use this verse all the time as an excuse for not coming to church), but as yourself, when was the last time you participated in a Bible Study or a Home Lenten Eucharist? Resolve this year to just once go out of your way for Christ. Attend one prayer meeting, one Bible Study, one function that finds you with Christ in your midst. Could this be number 3: "One attendance"?

In Matthew 28 Jesus instructs all his disciples to take his Gospel to the ends of the earth and tell of it to all that they meet. This year resolve to invite one person you know to come and share church with you Sunday morning. Number 4: "Invite a friend to church."

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In Matthew 5:23 Jesus says: If you are offering your gift at the Altar and remember that your brother has something against you, go and first be reconcile with your brother. This year forgive or seek forgiveness from one person.

Again in Matthew 6:6 Christ says: “When you pray, pray to your father who will reward you.” Number 6: “Resolve in every difficulty to pray more.”

Lastly: Jesus said in Matthew 7:21: “Seek to do the will of my Father in heaven.” Let us resolve as individuals and as a Christian community to seek to do God’s will in our lives.” “Do God’s will” Number 7.

What a way that would be for us as a community to follow Christ in this coming year, that we resolve to have faith, save a child, attend, invite a friend, seek to forgive, pray and do God’s will.

Paul in the letter to the Galatians tells us that God has sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts. It re-affirms our belief and faith that we are here not to further our own interests, but to do Christ’s work. He has left it to us to build his Kingdom on earth.

In the Gospel, John tells us: “He was in the world but the world knew him not. He came to his own and his own people would not accept him.” It is today, our job to accept Jesus and our job to make him known. The Christmas story told us: “And the word was made flesh and lived among us and we have seen his glory.”

Does all the political correctness over ‘Happy Holidays’ make you as mad as it does me? We Christians have to counteract that not by protesting it, but by being Christ in the midst of our town or our community. It is time to come out from behind our cobblestone walls and truly become effective witness to Christ and our faith. Let us force people to say as they said in Roman times: “Look at the way those Christians love one another.” Already I see so many doing precisely that at the Thanksgiving Dinner and Christmas gift day. Now is the time for the rest of us to seek to make Christ known throughout the year.

John says that because of Christ we have all received “grace upon grace.” In the Greek it means grace on top of grace. We are receiving through the person of Jesus, God’s love heaped upon love. We can never fully experience that love, till the day we decide to open our lives to it.

Until that day we will remain the child running with our plastic bucket to the sea and coming back to tell the world: “Look I have the ocean in my bucket.”

To believe, that Jesus Christ is your Savior and the Son of God, you have to take the plunge. You have to jump into the sea of God’s love that he provides, and become a part of his salvation.

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Believing, really believing is to stop playing at being a Christian and really become one. To be a believer, you must also be a disciple. To be a disciple you have to become another Christ with every fiber of your being.

That is so hard for many of us to do when our cell phone has made us part time Christians at the beck and call of everyone except the Body of Christ. To become Christ for others, we first need to seek his healing for ourselves, before we can give his healing to others.

There is “grace upon grace” let us pray that this year we open ourselves to it. We can only do that when we make up our minds to serve Christ and not our own interests, to serve God and not money; to serve the body of Christ and not merely give it the crumbs of our day.

Let us do that, and we can hold our heads proud that we lived a Christ filled year.

Amen+