

# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

2 Advent  
December 4, 2005  
Fr Bill McGinty

## **“Is Being a Christian Fun?”**

Today is the Second Sunday of Advent. The second Sunday in which we hear the readings of the Old Testament prophets and we consider the nature of God’s Great Plan of Salvation for all men, which culminates with Jesus being born at Bethlehem.

Amid all the hustle of the week, offices being painted, roofs being repaired and pipe organ campaigns planned, one of our six year old children asked her Father: “Is being a Christian fun?”

She had found the word in a magazine and asked him: “Daddy what is a Christian?” He replied: “A Christian is someone who believes in Jesus and his teaching and tries to become like him.”

It was a wonderful answer. Yet her retort: “Is being a Christian fun?” is probably the most significant theological question I have heard in recent years.

Ask yourself the same question. For you, “is being a Christian fun?” It is not a question that any of us adults would ever ask. It would never, occur to us. Yet when we look back, all the way to childhood there were so many happy times to remember. I was an Acolyte at a funeral once at age 10, when I leaned forward to look down into the grave the candle I was holding fell off its stick and bounced off the casket in the grave. The priest gave me a real bad look. Each one of us can tell a hundred stories of times we had at church. .

But this child’s question is about more than the funny things that happened; this child’s question is about what truly, deeply, makes us happy about following this man Jesus of Nazareth.

It forces us to ask another question. This man Jesus, have you ever met him? I ask that because we spend most of our life reading his Gospel, learning his teaching, trying to continue his healing, saving ministry. Surely, it would be an idea to have met him.

I believe that we can and we do meet Jesus and in two distinct ways. In the Gospels he can come alive for us. We reflect on his words and in a magical way we interact with Jesus and his teaching. It is this Jesus that we take on the road with us. He encourages us; he gives us words to say to others. In our quiet moments we reflect on him and dialogue with him. He becomes a source of spiritual strength for us.

But there is another Jesus that we encounter. He is harder to recognize. It is the Jesus that we find in other people. Not in all other people, but definitely in a few special people. In my life, I feel that these people always shared common ingredients. They had a natural ease. They were part prophet, such that you wanted to hear what they said. You were never quite sure just what they had, but you wanted it. They had natural

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gifts, such that you would say they were gifted, charmed or even graced. They were happy people and the time you spent with them you enjoyed. But they also had another common characteristic, they all seemed to have the ability to look inside your soul and challenge you to be better than you were, to go higher than you wanted, to be more than you could be, and they did that without ever judging you. Have you met people like that, because if you have, I think you have probably met Jesus too?

And not all these people were men. Many were women. A few were nuns who could get you to swim the Irish Sea even if you couldn't swim. Perhaps for you they were a parent, a loving Father, a caring Mother, or a sister who read you like a book and loved you as a person.

Perhaps it was an aunt, an uncle, a friend, a boss. For me quite a few of them were priests. Guys who I swear had rubbed shoulders with Jesus on the Road to Jerusalem and something of Jesus had rubbed off on them. I used to think of it as a special kind of magic.

So it was with my friend Eric Darwell who died last year. When Eric sang he sounded like Jim Reeves, but when he was on a sanctuary he looked and sounded like Jesus Christ. I never met anyone who so enjoyed being a priest and working for Christ more than Eric. It emanated from every fiber of his being.

He was a dreamer, a visionary, a worker, a teacher. Children flocked to him. Teenagers loved him. He worked tirelessly for the handicapped. He was the quintessential priest. He always had a smile and he was always optimistic. When you looked at Eric, you believed in Jesus. More than any other season Eric loved Advent. Advent brought out the prophet in him. It's colors, candles, rituals spoke to him so loud that every year in his mind he was back there with Mary, Joseph and Elizabeth reliving the events of Jesus' birth.

For Eric being a Christian was fun, but it was a fun that he had to share, and he did. He shared his entire life with people especially the young. Whether it was climbing in the mountains, or taking handicapped children on pilgrimage, Eric gave it his all. Did people have fun when Eric was around? Sure they did, but he never missed an opportunity to teach people about Jesus or to reach out to the poor and the rejected just as Jesus did.

I cannot see an Advent wreath without thinking about Eric Darwell. I have no doubt he haunts this building. If he could he would come back and say; "McGinty, McGinty you're not doing it right"

For Eric everything was about Jesus, but it was not a weak, holy Jesus. For Eric Jesus was the quarterback, Jesus was his Captain on a long patrol. Jesus was his hero. Jesus was his King.

Do you ever wake up and say: "My God but I love being a Christian?" Was it any wonder that Crusaders wore red crosses on their tunics? They believed that they lived, fought and died for Christ.

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I read an e-mail this week that suggested that we Christians should move the Feast of Christmas to the end of January. The reason: “pushing our religious views on people was offensive and we were ruining the holiday for everyone else.”

Listen to this from a Christian lady writing to the Times Herald Record: last week.

“I think it is terrible that some people are trying to take the words, ‘In God we trust,’ off our Federal buildings. Now I find a toy manufacturer that has joined them. He took off the words, ‘round yon virgin mother and child, holy infant so tender and mild’ He stopped them being played by a child’s toy. “We don’t want to offend non Christian people” the management said. Do you get the feeling some fun just went out of Christmas?

Taking Jesus out of Christmas is like taking love out of a marriage. Advent reminds us that we are involved in a cosmic event, an event that we call incarnation. Our God became man. He lived as one of us to teach us. To teach us how to grow our spirit, where love conquerors hate, mercy defeats violence, forgiveness replaces revenge.

Advent brings us hope, that love, mercy and forgiveness are winning. We will bring our Christ back again this year and we will tell our Christmas story. We will tell it in carols and pageants, on Christmas cards and in the message of the crib. More we will have fun in doing so.

Today’s reading instructs us: “Go tell your story of angels and stars, of prophets and kings that the whole world might know of your Christ King.” “A voice,” says Isaiah, “cries out in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

2 Peter speaks of the coming of the day of the Lord. It is the coming of Christ. His second coming when salvation will be complete. For most of us that will be the moment of our death when our Christ will claim us. He will give us divinity because we accepted his coming into the world and gave him a share in our human nature.

The Gospel today sends out a dire warning to all who would mess with God. “There is one who is coming into your midst. He is the son of God. Prepare yourselves.”

Let us pray:

Lord we pray that you’re coming among us may fill our lives with grace and hope again this Christmas. Help us to see you in the poor, the rejected, the hungry and the prisoner. Bring peace to our families and lives. Prepare us for the life that is to come.

Give to our children the joy of that holy night. The sense of awe and mystery your words induce. Allows them fun and play, wonder and happiness in this Christmas season and throughout their year.

Amen+

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