

Christmas Eve ~ December 24, 2016
Sermon preached by the Rev. Daniel Vélez Rivera
Readings: Isaiah 9: 2-7, Psalm 97, Titus 3: 4-7, Luke 2:1-20

...then Joseph said, "This new baby is going to change the world" He looked over at Mary and said, "there, I said it."

I love that line from the video "Christmas according to Kids" because it is a version of the Nativity story that helps us relate to the Holy Family in a new way at the time of the birth of Jesus. Happy Christmas eve!

I made a most untraditional request as you gathered here this evening for our Christmas eve service, I asked that you watch the Facebook video called, "Christmas According to Kids". The video is an amateur production created by members of the Southland Christian Church in Lexington, KY which went viral when it was made a few years ago, and goes viral each Christmas in a similar way, but with different technology, that the Jesus Nativity story went viral back in the day and does so every Christmas season! (See "Christmas According to Kids" on our website www.saintgabriels.net or on our Facebook page St Gabriel's Episcopal Church).

I asked that you watch the video so that you see and hear another version of the story of Jesus. All of us know that stories are important, without them we wouldn't be here celebrating the birth of our Messiah and King, without stories we would have less of an identity, without stories we might still be living in caves but even cave people drew stories on their cave walls!

The best part of Nativity stories is that they are part of who we are as Christians and they also belong to each us in unique ways. I use the plural stories to describe the Nativity because there are several versions or fragments of biblical stories that are woven into the New Testament books but they have roots in the Old Testament scripture of Genesis, Isaiah, Micah, Zechariah, and the Book of Psalms.

None of the Old Testament stories name Jesus but they refer to the Messiah as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Son of God, and prophet. Some of the stories like today's reading from Isaiah describe the person we call Jesus, some of the stories even refer to the women chosen to bring him into the world, Mary.

Stories can be passed on in so many ways. I love one-to-one conversations, but having seen the "Christmas according to Kids" video, which by the way made me cry and laugh at the same time, helps us realize the importance of owning our Jesus stories. The best ones get contextualized into our unique lives, "owned" so to speak by those who tell them and hear, see, or feel them.

At tomorrow's 3 o'clock Christmas Day service at St. James, the children will recreate their own version of a "Christmas story according to St. Gabriel's kids". Through the pageant, we help them create a story that they will own for ever and perhaps even remember for many

years ahead. Their stories will embody the Holy Mystery of Jesus, giving them and all who see it the authority and blessing to imagine and ponder the birth of our Savior, Jesus.

One of the great aspects of our humanness is the capacity to imagine. As I was helping Abi, the teen pageant director literally herd the sheep yesterday during the Nativity rehearsal, I asked the performers and their parents to imagine how it was that Jesus was born, what it might have felt to be an angel celebrating the birth of the Son of God, what it might have been like to be a shepherd that were told by God through the angels to check out the Messiah in that sleepy town of Bethlehem; and to imagine being Mary, Joseph, or even Jesus himself.

We all have great imaginations and infinite creativity, but kids in particular have that uncensored, expansive imagination that they put into words or into actions so readily – it's no wonder that our Lord, when he was an adult said, ""Let the little children come to me, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these." I imagine that he knew they would refresh him by their ingenuity, creativity, joy, and imagination!

Children young and old are kingdom bearers, we hold the kingdom of God, promised to us by our Savior Jesus Christ which is also why Jesus invites us into his story, so that we can be transformed by it. On this feast of the Nativity I invite you to recreate your Jesus story once again. Use your imagination, use your creativity, own it, and pass your story on to someone new.

Storytellers learned early on that people liked to hear stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end. I believe, however, that the Jesus story hasn't ended yet. The children of God are still re-creating it, that is because we are part of the Holy Mystery of God and of God's creation and because we have Holy imaginations. The characters in the Jesus story also keep changing, every time a newborn comes into the world the way Jesus did.

On this blessed and Holy night, I invite you to let your spirit soar as you listen and participate in the Nativity story. I invite you to let yourself ponder how the Son of God, Mary's son Jesus, is transforming your Holy story. May God bless you in this season of light, this season of compassion, and this season of infinite love. Blessed Christmas to one and all.

¡Feliz Navidad!