

Christmas 2016

12/25/16

Well, here we are at yet another Christmas. Advent is over, the time of waiting is over, the chaos of shopping for the perfect gifts is over. And now a different sort of chaos ensues. The trees are up, the presents are wrapped, food is ready for the family and friends that will be arriving. So, now what? What do we do with all that time we spent on getting ready? Will we remember why we had an Advent time or will we simply go back to life as usual?

Ogden Nash once wrote a lengthy poem called *The Christmas That Almost Wasn't*. Trust me, I'm not going to share the entire poem with you. But I do want to give you some of the highlights. The poem begins with a story about a peaceful kingdom ruled by a wise and gentle king. But the king had a nephew who was an evil man, whose name just happened to be Evillard. He was an unhappy person and hated anyone who was happy. But most of all, he hated Christmas.

One day he was able to capture the king and lock him in a dungeon. Evillard and his gang took over the kingdom and declared there would be no more Christmas. The rulers grimly smiled because they were out to destroy one tiny child, the Christ Child. The citizens were so upset they couldn't function; even nature was disturbed. Nash described it this way:

"No one knew when to work, nor yet when to play. For the sun shone by night and the moon shone by day. The mice had kittens, the cats had puppies; the lions had lambs and the whales had guppies. From headland to mainland, from mainland to isthmus, the wide world rebelled 'gainst a world with no Christmas."

Just imagine what the world would be like if Christ had not been born; perhaps we would be serving gods made of gold or silver. And maybe we would be sacrificing people to these idols. But most importantly, would we have ever heard about a loving, forgiving God? Would we have heard about loving that God and our neighbors as ourselves? Maybe but I'm glad we don't have to ponder those questions.

About one third of the world's population believes in Jesus – that's a lot of people. And sadly, we're not perfect. We're all sinners, we all make mistakes. So we can only imagine what the world would be like if all of us tried harder to live by Christ's teachings.

Lately, there has been an abundance of fake stories being posted on social media and in some ways, the Gospel we just heard could be considered fake. You see Mark's was the first Gospel and he makes no mention of the birth of the Savior. Jesus just shows up at the Jordan and is baptized. How do we really know there were angels and shepherds and a manger? Is Luke telling lies or is he just trying to put the birth within the context of a story? We don't know for sure but one thing we do know: the birth of Christ was an historical fact.

Luke tells us that Caesar Augustus was ruler over the whole known world and Quirinius was governor of Syria. That sets the stage for what is to follow. Those were real people, which implies Jesus was a real person who came into a real world. That we know is certain. Regardless of whether there were shepherds or angels or a manger, the course of human history was changed forever. As Frederick Buechner puts it, God became human of all things, became a little child of all things, just like each of us: naked, vulnerable, eating, sleeping, playing, crying; God brought light into a world of darkness.

As I was preparing this homily and listening to Christmas music, one of my favorite songs came on, entitled All Is Well, by Wayne Kirkpatrick and Michael W. Smith. I've shared the lyrics with you before but tonight I thought I'd finish by having you listen to the song itself. Because, when Jesus was born, darkness fell, born was Emmanuel and, indeed, all is well.

All is well all is well. Angels and men rejoice. For tonight darkness fell Into the dawn of love's light. Sing A-le, Sing Alleluia. It is well all is well. Let there be peace on earth. Christ is come go and tell that He is in the manger. Sing A-le, Sing Alleluia. All is well all is well. Lift up your voice and sing Born is now Emmanuel, Born is our Lord and Savior. Sing Alleluia. Sing Alleluia. All is well.