

SPG#117, Christmas Eve
December 24, 2006 – Fr. Charles Pope

A tired couple on their way to Bethlehem; Mary, pregnant with the Christ child, on the back of a donkey with Joseph leading. Shepherds in the fields watching sheep; hearing of the blessed event; angels announcing the birth and breaking into a chorus.

How many times have we done that story? How many times have we seen nativity scenes in front yards or in front of churches? How many times have we seen crèches on a table in homes or at church?

I suppose that any one of us would say, “I do not know. I have witnessed the story in words or in images so often that I have no idea of how often.”

And we really do not keep records like that, of how many times we have witnessed the story of the Nativity. But at this time of year it is common to be in and out of the story as we see images, read words, hear words read, and just in our own pondering. And so we might see a nativity scene in a neighbor’s front yard from our car on our way home from work. And that viewing of that scene might come right before we fixed and ate supper.

Or we might hear carols played at the store while we shop for groceries.

And so the story, at this time of the year, is everywhere. And it is interwoven with all that we are doing in our everyday lives. It is such a cultural phenomenon that in the course of a day or a week, we are always somewhere near it.

But now at church on Christmas Eve, it is different. For we are immersed in words, in images, in music. Our hearts are turned up. And we do not just witness the story again, as we turn to do something else. We are in the story. In our worship we ourselves become part of the story. We could say it is special because of our being in and out of the story during Advent. And finally on Christmas Eve, there is this climactic moment.

But really, when you stop and think about it, the specialness that we feel on Christmas Eve in worship is part of the nature of the story. For the story itself is a converging of figures toward a soft center. The figures and events of the Nativity revolve slowly around the soft and glowing center of the child in the manger with his parents.

And so it may come as a surprise after weeks of moving in and out of the story, that we now are just in it. Now we stand with Mary, Joseph and the shepherds outside this inn, in this manger. Being in Bethlehem, in the manger is not the same as moving toward it.

For now we are immersed in the love and presence of God, immersed in our love for each other, bathed in the soft, warm, and loving glow of the birth, of Christmas.

And after weeks of being in and out, it may be somewhat unnerving to just be here. That soft and warm glow of Christmas is something that we all hunger for. And yet just to be in the glow may be somewhat unsettling. And maybe we are not sure what to do.

And perhaps those of us in the 21st century could learn a thing or two about just being in Christ.

To be sure, we will leave this place to do something else. And eventually we will go back to a rhythm of going to the store, going to work, coming home, eating supper, watching TV, and

many other things. But before you go tonight, make it a point to specifically enjoy the warm glow of the birth of Jesus Christ.

And as you enjoy that soft glow yourself, you will radiate that love of God to all of us here. And as you go from this place, as you continue to enjoy, your life becomes a gift of love to all persons you encounter.

Boys and girls, ladies and gentlemen, as we stand at the manger, in the soft and warm glow of the love of God and our love for each other it will be natural for us to see and feel that Christ is born. Amen.