

First Presbyterian Church  
Christmas Pageant  
Reflections: Rev. Catherine Oliver  
December 23, 2018

Like the shepherds we just saw in our Christmas pageant, who shook with fear before the multitude of angels who were proclaiming the Good News of Jesus' birth.

I stand before you today also shaking with fear!

Most people know, it is really not a good idea to be the follow-up preacher after a Christmas pageant.

Our children and youth have enacted the Gospel Word with such thoughtfulness and enthusiasm. We have not just heard, but experienced through their pageant, the drama, the story of Jesus's birth, and **the truth that God is with us!**

In the weeks leading up to Christmas I have been asked, by more people than I can count, grocery store clerks and even the cheery guy changing my oil at the Jiffy lube, wearing a Santa hat, the same question...

**"Are you ready for Christmas?"**

I hesitate to answer their question, kind of smile and then say, "I hope so."

But lately I've taken their question to heart.

What does it mean to **be "ready"** for Christmas?

My neighbors have gone all out this year. Their homes are beautifully lit up with twinkling lights and wreaths.

One neighbor even has a huge Santa with a reindeer sleigh in his front yard, not to mention a gazillion lights.

So does this mean that they are **ready for Christmas?**

This year, for me, being ready for Christmas isn't about the lights or buying a bunch of gifts to go under a tree that will never stand up straight or even be decorated.

Especially this year, I'm preparing for Christmas differently.

I'm holding on to hope. I'm trying to find peace in a weary world.

I'm searching for joy that I can share with others who need a leg up.

And I'm trying to reflect the love of a new baby, Jesus, the little one who had no idea what he was getting into when he was lying in a manger, with his mother adoring him.

And so I wonder are you ready for Christmas?

I wonder which part of the pageant story speaks most clearly to your heart during this season?

Do you relate more to the shepherds, who by the way, did an amazing job of falling down and rolling around as they acted out their fear of being surprised by angels?

If you related to the shepherds, do you feel a call to run and spread the Good News of great joy?

Do you want to shout out, go and tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere?...

Do you want to tell everyone that God, Emmanuel has come to us in the flesh and through the holy Spirit dwells within us?

Do you want to shout out, that God sticks to us like Velcro?

God wraps us up in a warm blanket of love and will never let us go, no matter how lonely, how depressed, how messed up we are?

As a shepherd, do you remember that God chooses us,  
chooses you to care for and love God's sheep?

Especially in times of fear, especially in times of distress when you have to care for a bunch of misguided, (brainless) sheep who wonder all over, getting into all sorts of trouble?

(Wait....)

Or perhaps you related more to Mary?

The new mother who was besieged by a bunch of shepherds with the “good news,” and maybe some advice.

“You have a beautiful baby boy, and by the way a host of angels told us he is the Messiah, which means your baby is ummm,...the living God with us!

You, like Mary may ponder in your heart what in the heck that all means.

What does it mean for you that God, by the power of the Holy Spirit dwells within you?

Some of us need help understanding all of this good news of great joy.

I think of those who wait and wait and wait to understand where is God when like Jesus, they are born into poverty and ruled by an empower of injustice and violence?

For others, what does it mean to become a holy voice that speaks out, sees with eyes of compassion and allows your life to be given over completely to God and follow God’s ways?

I flip back and forth between being a shepherd who wants to go tell it everywhere and Mary who needs to ponder this amazing gift of God with us, in her heart.

This is the time of holy mystery and celebration of Jesus’ birth.

So am I ready for Christmas? Do I believe that Christ dwells within me. I say yes!  
Are you ready for Christmas? Do you believe Christ dwells with you. I hope so!

As the prophet Isaiah reminds us, “The children will lead us”  
And they have done so today!

Let us follow their lead.

Amen