

CHRISTMAS EVE: LESSONS AND CAROLS | DECEMBER 24, 2023

MICAH 5:2-4 | ISAIAH 35 | JEREMIAH 22:13-16; 23:5,6 | ISAIAH 11:1-9 | LUKE 2:1-20

There's an old joke that people tell in my home state of Maine. Back in the days before google maps, it was not uncommon for summer tourists—usually people from Massachusetts—to get lost. And when they did, they would find a nice-looking local, roll down their window, and ask how to get to their bed and breakfast or their dinner reservation on the coast. To which you would respond, “Well, you can't get there from here.”

It's not a bad way of summing up the world's problems, so many of which seem intractable. We may have an idea where we want to end up, but it seems difficult if not impossible to see the way to get there. To take the obvious examples, a lasting and dignified peace between Israelis and Palestinians, an end to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the resolution of violence all around the world that causes so many to leave their homes.

This is to say nothing, of course, of our own problems closer to home. Our own struggles to rebuild after a pandemic killed a million of our fellow citizens. A political system which seems to be held together with two-week stop-gap measures and duct tape. And a sense that public life—the places we exist not as producers or consumers—is increasingly anemic.

We know what we want. Peace. Stability. Justice. Community. But it's hard to see how we get there. The old joke sounds more like a lament. We can't get there from here.

And so, we are told, give up. Throw in the towel. Lower your expectations. Grin and bear it. Just make sure you “Get Yours,” to use the old CNBC tagline. Nihilism, despair, and self-centeredness aren't just understandable, they're signs of wisdom and maturity.

And that would be good advice were it not for tonight. When we remember how, some two thousand years ago, God's great love for all of creation was poured out among us in one singular human life. And this child is born not to kings and queens, not in a golden palace, not with a nest egg awaiting him. But among people living in difficult situations. To people with uncertain futures. To people who would be unremarkable were it not for the calling God has placed on their lives.

Christ is not born over there. But as one of our hymns puts it, “For sinners here the silent Word is pleading.” God meets us *here*.

So on Christmas, *Here* isn't quite what it used to be. It's not a place devoid of God's presence. But a place of possibility and potential. And so the question for us is not *What would Jesus do if he were alive and here today?* But the question is always *What is the risen Christ doing here within and among us now?*

This is not a panacea, of course. No quick fixes. No simple solutions. But it does change our posture toward the future and toward one another. If Christ is here, there is no situation which is beyond God's redemption, no people beyond God's love, and no times beyond God's hand. Because Christ was born among us, there is always cause for hope. And there is always cause for love. There is always reason for action.

If Christ is with us, we can get there from here. How? I don't know. But St. Luke tells us this. That called together and sent to serve by the Holy Spirit, we get there together. Meeting here with Christ our brother and walking the way toward his kingdom.

Joseph Schattauer Paillé, Pastor

ADVENT LUTHERAN CHURCH
777 WYCKOFF AVENUE | WYCKOFF, NJ 07481
(201) 891-1031 | ADVENTLUTHERANWYCKOFF.ORG