

The Reverend T. Stewart Lucas
St. Margaret's Church
Christmas Day 2009

Merry Christmas.

Now we don't often do this in the Episcopal Church, but I want you to raise your hand if you sent out Christmas cards this year. Well isn't that good for you?

I have a love/hate relationship with Christmas cards. I love sending them, but I can never find ones I like. So basically I rarely send Christmas cards. I love receiving them, so I've decided to just leave it at that. Jesus comes anyway.

I have seen just a few Christmas cards I'd actually love to buy but never get around to it. There is the one with the black and white photo of nuns fully dressed in habits throwing snowballs at one another. (An added bonus was the glitter that had been glued to the snow.) When you opened the card it said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

But when I do get around to sending cards, I like to send funny Christmas cards. I like a card that is a touch irreverent. A card that might make someone smile.

This year I saw a card that had Mary and Joseph on a donkey obviously in a desert going towards Bethlehem and in the distance you can see a Wal-mart. Inside the card read: There used to be an Inn here! My most favorite card this year though may be the very serious looking one I saw...it was a formal manger scene...one of those with touches of gold around it. Mary and Joseph are looking lovingly down at the baby Jesus and Joseph says, "He has my eyes." And Mary replies, "Honey, there is something I've been meaning to tell you."

Well I guess Christmas does last for 12 days, so we've still got time to put some cards in the mail. Or maybe not.

Christmas is here. No more John the Baptist telling us one who is greater than he is coming. The time has come. No more waiting for Mary and Joseph or for us. No more time for preparation. Christ is here. We've made it to the manger and the story is true. We have a newborn king. Thanks be to God! Alleluia!

You know, come to think of it, our lectionary, the scripture set out for us to read in church every Sunday is sort-of like a Christmas card. We get a little snapshot of the story, but not the whole thing. We might get a manger scene or pictures of a family or even a holiday letter, but none of our holiday greetings amount to telling everything that has happened in our lives this year. In our cards, we wish each other love and joy and leave out the everyday disappointments of the last 12 months. We send warmest blessings and don't mention the illness that kept us from work or the financial troubles we're having. Our Christmas cards usually carry few words, but they are often what we want to say.

I love you. I miss you. I'm thinking of you. Merry Christmas. Happy New Year.

You know there is no perfect Christmas card that can portray what the scene was really like that night in Bethlehem. There were no Hallelujah Choruses blaring on loud speakers. No glitter, no lights, no packages, no snow, no precious children looking on the radar to see where Santa's sleigh is parked.

No, it was a barn, a stable. No Christmas card can give us the sounds or the smell. It was a pretty ordinary scene. Hard and uncomfortable to be exact. There was no epidural or midwife, no cigars or balloons. Just ordinary people bearing, actually sneaking God into the world.

So I wonder what kind of card Mary and Joseph would send to us today? What about the shepherds who dropped everything to visit the new born king?

Well I have a feeling they would all send a card with few words. Perhaps something like "Praise be to God." God is a good God who looks with fondness and care on those who believe in him no matter what their position in life. God is fulfilling promises made long ago. It seems to me that this is all we can do on this most holy of days. Praise God. Praise God for coming to be among us. Praise God for making the invisible visible.

Well, so what.

So what? So what does any of this stuff about Christmas cards and Mary have to do with us? So what does any of this stuff matter?

Gratitude. It matters not just because God shows favor on Mary and Joseph, a couple who most people would pass by and look over.

This stuff matters because MARY, when given the HUGE responsibility of bearing GOD, says Thank you. Mary is a nobody and STILL God breaks into her life. She doesn't deserve it...She knows she is lowly and unadorned with power or might. Yet God chooses her, and the world changes forever.

It matters because some lowly poor shepherds saw some angels in the sky and heard some good news that there was a new king who would save them. It matters because those shepherds left what they were doing, took their flocks and went to check it out.

It matters because too often we forget to give thanks for the gifts in our very midst. It matters because too often we forget to see the greatest moments in our lives

It matters because too often we forget to look for the good news sneaking into the world all around us. And we forget to listen to the messengers in our lives. And we forget to GO and TELL that good news to the world.

“You might remember the great singer Marian Anderson. At the height of her career, a reporter asked her to name the greatest moment of her life. A friend of hers recounts the moment like this:

I was in the dressing room when the reporters came in and I was curious to hear her answer. After all, I knew that she had many, many great moments to choose from. There was the night, for example, that Toscanini told Marian Anderson she had the greatest voice of the century. There was the private concert that she gave at the White House for the Roosevelt’s and the King of England. There was the time that she got the famous \$10,000 Bach award from her hometown of Philadelphia. Then, of course, to top it all, there was that famous Easter Sunday in Washington when she stood beneath the statue of Abraham Lincoln and sang for 75,000 people, including members of the Supreme Court and Congress.

Which of these moments did she choose? She chose none of them. Miss Anderson told the reporter that the greatest moment of her life was the day she went home and told her mother she wouldn’t have to take in washing anymore.”¹

That is why all this talk of Mary matters. God came to a young girl, a washer woman, a person with no stature and said she wouldn’t have to take washing in any more. What God did for Mary, God does for each of us. God breaks into our lives when we feel lost and lonely or simply lowly and least. God breaks into our lives at unexpected moments and turns everything upside down and we are never the same.

It happened to Mary and Joseph. We have seen and heard the story. We all have the image we’d like to see on a Christmas card. But wouldn’t it be nice if the most popular Christmas card at Hallmark had a picture of you and me and my family and yours, and a bunch of people we have yet to meet. All of us could be on the cover, dropping everything we are doing because we’ve heard some good news. Over us would be a big ensign, a huge banner that reads “The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord.”

And then on the inside of the card, we’d be going to check out the good news. And then singing and giving thanks to God without fear. There could be pictures of us going and telling the whole world, so that everyone can understand and know the joy of that good news, the peace that surpasses all our understanding. The salvation that turns our ordinary everyday worlds upside down with the peace that only comes from God through Jesus Christ, our newborn King. Emmanuel, God is with us.

Now that’s a Christmas card I’d love to mail.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia. Amen.

¹ P125. #24, William Bausch