

December 24, 2017

“God Has Come!”

Luke 2:1-14

Has anyone noticed the words on the window of one of the art galleries in the town this month? They said, “If There Is A God, Why Doesn’t He Prove It?”

The clergy in the area had a lively email exchange about this. One took it as an atheist manifesto. and wrote: “I think a creative response is in order, like...we get permission from the business next door ... to put up a sign in identical type saying: ‘She does and She has!’ And list our churches underneath...”

Another responded to this email. “I’m on board with making a response. “

Another one joined. “I’m fully on it!”

A cautious and deeper-in-thought clergy raised our awareness to use this as a spring board to reach anyone in the community by possibly using a website or some kind of communication device.

Another one wished for “something interactive” -- such as a chalkboard with the line, “Today I saw God,” and allowing people to write where they did see the face of God.

By then a curious one had gone ahead to see the sign and to speak to the owner of the gallery to learn what his/her intention had been for those words.

It turned out that those words are an expression of an art work from an artist, whose works were on display in the gallery. The artist saw those words printed in a Christian tract, which was handed out to him when he got out from a subway in the city. The artist believes in the existence of God and his art works seem to be the response to the question, “If There Is A God, Why Doesn’t He Prove It?”

The email exchanges with my colleagues on this topic have enlightened me to see God or to find God in our lives this Advent and Christmas season. The following is where I’ve seen God and found God’s message, Immanuel, which means “God with us.”

When I was walking in town one day in December, I came across someone I know, who happened to be in his front yard, and we started to talk. He showed me a bush of PJM Rhododendron in his yard and told me that this bush has exceptional winter

hardiness. It bloomed in this mild winter season. He took some flowers off the bush, handed them to me and said, "When I see those flowers, I know there is God. I see God in nature." I saw God alive and being with this person.

The last three months have been a challenging time for our family. My husband was in Ohio over two months, receiving a medical treatment. Meanwhile I was at a place our church friends provided. When Susumu finished his treatment in Ohio and came back to Bellport, we moved into a cottage in town, where we stayed over three weeks. Meanwhile, I went back and forth between the parsonage and the place where I was staying every day, to do something I needed to do at the parsonage or to pick up something from there. In this temporal but unusual situation, I did what I had to do and I had to let go of some things I normally do or take care of. One of the things I had to let go was watering house plants. Without water, almost all the plants died one by one.

When I stopped at the parsonage one day, however, I found this. (P.P.) Christmas cactus! In spite of the lack of water and care, it blossomed in the dry soil. To me it was a bright sign from God -- "I am here." Of all the plants in the house, Christmas cactus survived and bloomed to give me the Christmas message, "God with us. Emmanuel."

A small group of people gathered in this sanctuary this past Wednesday and Friday evenings for a Blue Christmas Service. We received the Christmas message again: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." This message was ours to claim and receive in our darkest days. There was a sense in this sanctuary that we are not alone - God is with us along with other sojourners of their longest days. I saw God present with us and among us.

Carolers from our church visited 11 homes and sang Christmas carols. As I saw how much people were touched by our visits, I knew God came to them. God was with us all, those who were visited and those who caroled.

The people in our congregation bought and brought to the church the gifts for Adopt A Family program through Mary Immaculate RCC and for the Christmas Shop at St. Joseph the Worker RCC. When our volunteers dropped off our gifts at those churches, they saw joy, love and thankfulness filling the rooms there. We know God is there in our giving and in our service.

I experienced “Emmanuel, God with us,” in the process of the recent parsonage clean-up and in all the people who were involved in the clean-up effort and in bringing our family back to the lovely parsonage again. God has been with us.

God comes to us through resilient flowers, through our worship experience and the fellow sojourners who share in the “blueness” in this season. God has come through the messages sung in the carols, through the caring and loving people in our lives and around us.

God comes to us in various forms and shapes in the way we can see and understand God, so that we may know that God is with us, Emmanuel.

Have you seen God this Advent and Christmas?

Where have you seen God this advent and Christmas?

The Christmas story proclaims that God took a human form and came to live with us so that we may know who God is and how much God loves us. We are here tonight to celebrate his birth. He was born to a lowly young couple in a humble place in a little town of Bethlehem. His birth was meant for all humanity, for everyone on earth - for the rich and the poor, for the noble and the lowly, for the educated and the uneducated, for the young and the old, for men and women, for the people of all colors and for the people with different ethnic backgrounds.

Do you see God in Jesus?

If your answer is “Yes,” and if your answer to the question, “If There Is A God, Why Doesn’t He Prove It?” is “Yes, God exists and God has proven it in many ways,” then it is time again for us to make a commitment to take the light of Christ and share it with others -make a commitment to be the light so that those who may walk in the darkness or those who may not know that God exists may come to see and know God.

Soon we will light the candles you have with you, which were given to you when you came to the service tonight. We will receive the light from the Christ candle and pass it to the person next to us, in front of or behind us. As we receive the light and pass it to others, let us commit ourselves again to continue to receive the light of Christ from now on too and to continue to pass it to others.

Light shines in the darkness and darkness has not overcome it. Amen.