

Christmas Day
Church of the Holy Cross
December 25, 2014
The Rev. Elizabeth A.B. Tesi

There is a wonderful British movie out there called “Millions”, about the story of two brothers who find a large bag of money. They’ve just moved to a new house after the sudden death of their mother. One day, in the fort they made out of cardboard moving boxes, a bag of money falls out of the sky. They debate their course of action—they both agree to keep the money. One of the brothers is visited by saints; the other brother wants to use the money to buy things. Naturally, there is also a bad guy, after them for the money. In one part of the movie, the little boy Damien (the one who has been getting visits from saints, and who kept asking if they knew his mother) is hiding from the bad guy in an attic. He is terrified as the bad guy creeps closer and closer...

To see the next part of this story, you need to watch the deleted scenes. As he trembles in terror, the camera angle widens... to show him surrounded by all the saints with whom he’s been speaking. Nicholas. Burly Peter. Saints from Uganda. Catherine. At one point, he begins to sneeze, which would certainly have given him away to the bad guy. And one of the saints wraps her arms around him and holds his nose. They wrap him in a constant presence of love, keeping him safe.

Tonight, we celebrate a birth. And if that was all that Christmas was, this would be a very boring way to spend a couple of hours. If a single baby’s birth, which happened more than 2,000 years ago was all that Christmas was about, it would be kind of pointless. We celebrate that in *this* birth, God wrapped the arms of eternity around a terrified and trembling world.

Mary and Joseph were both visited by angels. In the last days of her pregnancy they traveled to Bethlehem for the mundane purposes of being taxed. It was there that she went through the messy work of birthing. She had only had her young fiancé, balancing the responsibilities of the law and taxation with those of his new family. Mary and Joseph were the first to know the story—that this baby boy they held was indeed God incarnate. The angels had told them the miracle that this birth carried, and in their arms, they knew they held Love itself, incarnate.

Yes, the birth is the miracle that occurred 2,000 years ago. The angel visits, the manger, the filled inns, the taxations, the cruel king Herod, all that is literally ancient history. Will this story make us kinder, more generous people? Will we learn to give without blame, to forgive without grudging, to feel that we have enough? If this story hasn’t taught us to offer love without fear or shame, we might be missing the point.

You are here tonight to hear the warm comfort of a love story that surpasses all love. You are here tonight to be wrapped in the arms of the saints, sung to by the angels, cradled by the God of love. Long ago, Mary birthed a baby attended only by Joseph, and was surprised by the coming of Shepherds and the singing of angels to visit at the birth. Today, you sit warm, in a church that is quite literally a beacon. This place has no stained glass. When we are lit up from within, we literally shine out against the darkness.

You are here tonight because the world is beloved to God. This is the transformational grace that wrapped Mary and her family in love all those years ago. This is the transformation that the church proclaims- that God wraps us in eternity. And we ask you

to carry that light in your soul into the world around us. God loved, and because God loved, God became, and enfolded Godself in humanity, that we might know love in eternity. That indeed is a miracle worthy of carols and candlelight. Merry Christmas, indeed, beloved ones.