

December 30, 2012

Christmas One

Text: Isaiah 63:7-9

Theme: The Present of Presence, the Best Present of All

**Isaiah 63:7-9** "I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely." And he became their Savior. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old."

**We love the celebration of Christmas in the Church because in the very secular world in which we live, it somehow seems as though Jesus is closer to us during this season. It is, after all, the celebration of the time when Jesus took on human flesh and lived among us as a human being for about 34 years. But it has been a long time since his birth in Bethlehem and it seems to me that it becomes extraordinarily easy to historicize Jesus right alongside the Renaissance and the Battle of Bull Run. Jesus was a great and wonderful prophet who came and went and left behind him a religion. But don't focus only on Jesus' work just during those years while he was physically on earth.**

**Christ was on earth as a human being for only a few years, but his work extends into eternity.**

**When Isaiah spoke to his people, it had been sometime since God had been visibly present to them. It had been more than 700 years since the exodus when God was so clearly present in the pillars of cloud and fire, the burning bush, the glory of the Lord that descended upon the tent of meeting. Perhaps the people, like us, found it easy to historicize God as though he had little to do with their day to day lives. The prophet speaks words of good news to the people, letting them know that God is very active in their lives and we who have come after the Messiah and wait for his return, hear these words of the prophet as well and they tell us that Christ is still very present and very active.**

**What was the best present you got this Christmas? What was the best present you ever received? The best present I ever received was in February of 1964 when I was baptized. I got Jesus, my own personal savior who lives with me, walks with me, stands beside me and even carries me sometimes. He is with me 24 hours a day, seven days a week, year in and year out. Not, once in 49 years has he left my side. I can live without the microscope I got when I was seven. I can continue to survive without the flat screen TV I got last Christmas. I can even continue on with life without my new fountain pen that**

**Dänya gave me this year. The best present I ever received, and finally the only one that really matters was the present of Jesus' presence in my life through Baptism.**

**Jesus' presence is not bound to the incarnation. At his birth, he was present in a very special way, no doubt. But he is no less present now. Isaiah reminds us that it is steadfast loves and compassion that motivates God to intercede in our lives. Just because Jesus has ascended into heaven for a time doesn't mean that his steadfast love and compassion have wavered.**

**The prophet Isaiah also brings up the basis of his presence. Why does he pour out all of this steadfast love and compassion on us? Simple, we are his people. He decided that we would be his children and he is going to do everything he can to insure that we will remain his people. With Jesus it really is that simple. His love for us and devotion to us is not based on us. It is based on him and he declared that we were his people.**

**Even knowing that God's compassion and steadfast love go beyond the time that Jesus walked on earth, and even knowing that Jesus will never leave us because he has declared us to be his people and is thereby bound to us, there is more reason to believe that Jesus will never leave our side even though he has ascended into heaven.**

**He was actively involved with the people of God before he was ever born of Mary. Just because Jesus took on flesh in Bethlehem does not mean that he came into existence in Bethlehem. He has always existed and he has always been with his people.**

**Isaiah points out that the angel of his presence saved the people. In his love and mercy he redeemed them. He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Now who has the power to redeem? Isaiah is telling people about Jesus before the name Jesus had been given to him. And yet, incarnate or not, he was just as present for Isaiah's people as he was in Bethlehem and as he is now.**

**If we look for him, we continue to see his presence among us. In Baptism we wear his robes of righteousness and by wearing his righteous robes, we receive his life and he receives ours. Thus he takes all of the sin upon himself and we are left pure and holy. He continues to speak to all who will listen in his Word. We are not forced to listen, but if we wish to hear our savior, the angel of the Lord speak to us, he is always there. In Holy Communion, not only is he present and not only does he speak to us, but his body and blood flow into us for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith. We wear his robes. We hear his Word. We receive his body and blood. How much more present can he be in our lives?**

**Jesus is not a figure from history although he is historical. Jesus is the second person of the Holy Trinity who has always existed and who has always led his people in steadfast love and compassion. He is present now, and his presence is the best present we could have hoped for because with Jesus present, we are not a pawn of fate or a victim of the time, we are the Holy people of God, the Church, marching onward to heaven.**