

What Now?
Sermon for Christmas Morning
Sunday, December 25, 2011 – The Rev. Torrence Harman

It is Christmas morning. It's morning after a long, but exciting night. Mary is tired but radiant. Joseph, standing close is leaning on his staff, blinking his eyes, trying to stay awake.

The angels, still bending near the earth, are hoarse and ready to take off for a little R&R – that is, until God sends them out again with another important message. They have been busy – for what on earth could have been more important than the messages they have been giving through the night – singing their hearts out to draw us into the mystery of that holy night.

The shepherds are gone – off somewhere talking about what they have seen to anyone who will listen. Their sheep are wandering a bit on the hillside, but with a confident sense that they are still safe. The cattle and other four footed creatures crowded in the stable during the night are snuffing around for their morning hay, but careful not to disturb the bedding in the manger.

And the child? Well, the child is snuggling close to his mother and gazing out into a world made new with morning light. Does he remember where he has come from? Does he remember why he is here? Or are those questions for later, with answers to come over time – as he grows from childhood to manhood, as he remembers his “before time” and who he is and why he's here.

It is Christmas morning. And now where are we – you and I – in this picture? Metaphorically speaking, I hope we have been kneeling at the scene – overcome with the power of what was happening, with awe and thanksgiving in our heart to just be there and to be brought into the wonder of the birth of the savior. But is this just a fleeting scene? Has it mattered in our lives? Will it make a difference in our lives? Have we taken, truly taken any of it in – that is into our hearts?

I'm not sure God wants us to treat this night that has passed, this morning that is here and now as simply a metaphor. Like the pretty picture on a Christmas card, placed on the mantle so we can glance at it from time to time this Christmas and feel the warmth of the season. Then put it away or discard it. After all the next Christmas is a year away. We'll get more Christmas cards then. And it's easy for the memory of this Christmas past to fade.

Of course, Mary and Joseph and the baby will be gone from the stable in a day or two. Joseph has been registered. The birth has happened in a safe place, not home, not the inn, but a

warm, secure place. The holy family won't be interrupting the life of the four footed occupants of the stable any more.

The shepherds will go back to their hillside where the same old sheep are waiting for them. And their minds will turn again to the tasks of gathering the flock back together, keeping them safe and well fed, watching for predators whose thoughts may have turned to lamb for dinner. When the grass gets thin they'll herd the sheep to greener hillsides, to waiting water holes. How long will they really remember this night as their day to day, night after night, routine replaces awe and wonder? And they question each other – were those really angels?

So where do we go from here?

Liturgically, our church calendar gives us only about a week of Christmas time. Next Sunday will be the last Sunday of Christmas. And then comes the Epiphany. Of course, it too, like Christmas, is all about light. A star guiding us towards the true light that has come into the world. Where, where is the light? What is our search for light all about? How do we find it and how do we follow it once we find it? Those are the questions for Epiphany.

In a few days the manger will be empty. We can't linger at the stable; there will be nothing there to watch anymore. The baby will move on. The Messiah will move on carried by his mother into a world not sure of what it's waiting for, if anything.

Will we follow? If Christmas night is about a Divine desire to draw us into God's timeless story of hope coming into the world and salvation coming to all who walk in darkness, then our "next steps" become critical. Will we follow this holy child, feeling something new has been born in us? Will we journey with him, uncertain just where the road may go, but trusting that we have heard and seen a miracle, something remarkably special, and that this presence is walking with us towards his eternal home and ours – the heart of God.

Consider the journey ahead. Are you willing to take it? Have you let this holy night and a divine baby introducing us to a new day on this glorious Christmas morning – have you let him and the seed of new life take up a home in you? So that where this Christ goes, you go too? So that where you go he is with you, king and savior, always.

On this beautiful Christmas morning, reach out to this baby as he reaches out to you and with a grateful soul and a brimming heart, follow your Emmanuel. New life begins again, if you believe it can!

Welcome to a new day! And to Christ who is in it! Alleluia!!