

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. 10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

I have heard from a number of you since I was standing in this place last week. Last week, I talked about FRUITCAKES. Someone, whose initials are Amy McVicker, posted a cartoon on my Facebook page (among four posts to my Facebook page about fruitcakes) which said, **“Unbeknowst to many theologians, there was a fourth wise man, who was turned away [from the manger] for bringing a fruitcake.”**

A preacher loves it when the congregation “gets into” a sermon metaphor. Sometimes I wonder if the metaphor becomes too powerful – i.e. is remembered for itself, and not for the teaching point it attempts.

Last Sunday I was trying to make the point that Advent is about preparing us to receive something ENTIRELY NEW at Christmas – about being willing to be open to the coming of Jesus to give us a gift unlike we have ever been willing to admit possible – ***you know, like learning how to like fruitcake.***

Today’s scripture talks about farmers who are patient enough to wait for something, because they are pretty sure that it WILL come and it IS worth waiting for.

I remember that when I was a small child, I made a Christmas wish list. And the month of December always seemed to last such a l-o-o-o-o-n-g time, until the 25<sup>th</sup>. But it was worth the wait, because I knew that I was going to be made happy then.

I know that many of the things said at this time of year are things like:

- Christmas – it’s just for the children.

- Christmas – we’ve got to get back to the real meaning, and get away from all the commercialization.

**But!** I say – **IF ONLY we could get back to that same sort of anticipation, then we big people could claim (re/claim) the HolyDay for what it is – just like the children are able to do.**

**Llamo Dhondup** was only two years old, when he was taken from his parents home. He was taken away to a huge castle – not to be held for ransom, but to be pampered and brought up in a rich, rich style of life, and taught by the greatest teachers in the land. Little Lhamo was not given much of a chance in life to become anything other than what his captors intended.

Three years after Llamo’s birth, on the other side of the world, in Buenos Aeros, Argentina, little **Jorge Mario Bergoglio** was born. No one kidnapped him. He grew up a relatively normal life. Few people from outside his close circle of family or friends knew of him. But he grew up in a loving environment, knowing the love of Jesus. And he became a priest. He was a very special priest to those who knew him. But few would have known back then that when he was SEVENTY-SEVEN YEARS OLD, he would change his name and become famous all over the world. He changed his name to Francis, when a bunch of old men wearing red hats elected him pope.

**Jorge Mario Bergoglio** became **Francis**, at age **77**. **Llamo Dhondup** was recognized from the age of **2** as being **His Holiness, the Dalai Lama**.

They were both given a new name, to signify the new rank that they had received.

I wish they had stayed **Jorge** and **Llamo**.

From what I have learned about both men, they are indeed good people. They are indeed **HOLY PEOPLE**. But one of the things that I have heard **Llamo Dhondup** say

over and over is that *he is just one of 7 billion people on planet earth; he claims this as his identity. The moment he begins to think that he is more special than the other 7 billion people, then he has lost his way.*

- **You, too, are a good person.**
- **You, too, are a holy person.**
- **I am, too.**

And this is the GIFT OF CHRISTMAS, that we need to be prepared to receive. We are growing into it. If we would but ACCEPT this, then we would be so much closer to BECOMING OUR DESTINY.

I have said, over and again, that the Gift of Christmas is that **the Divine became human so that we can claim our divinity.** I have actually toned down what the early church fathers said. Saints Athanasius and Irenaeus (a century apart) both said that **For He was made man that we might be made God.** My rendition of it: **the Divine became human so that we can claim our divinity** is meant to make it not seem so radical, because we have been taught something else for so long.

For the longest time – most of our adult lives – we have been fed a line of theology to explain the necessity of Christ’s divinity in terms of his bearing the sins of the world. That means that the whole Christmas thing was only in order to accomplish the Good Friday thing. It’s all about Good Friday. Easter is just the icing on the cake. Big word for the day: Substitutionary Atonement Theology.

But, such was NOT the notion of Jesus for the first several centuries of the church. Instead, it was **God was made man that we might be made God.**

**St. Seraphim of Sarov**, a Russian monk of the nineteenth century, went into the forest with his disciple, Motovilov [**Moto-Vee-Lof**], during a snowstorm. While

praying, St. Seraphim became iridescent in appearance, to the point of emitting what was for Motovilov an almost blinding light. Accompanying this glow was a warmth in the midst of the Russian winter snow, along with a beautiful fragrance and unspeakable joy and peace. St. Seraphim attributed this blessed state to his having grown into what was his destiny: **God was made man that we might be made God.**

Abba Joseph, a desert father in the era of the fourth through sixth centuries, was approached by Abba Lot, who informed him that he had kept his rule of prayer, fasted, purified his thoughts, and lived peaceably—what more could he do? Abba Joseph held out his hands toward heaven, fingers extended, and said, “You can become fire.” Each fingertip blazed like a candle. Abba Joseph’s point was that the younger monk could also be set ablaze by his destiny: **God was made man that we might be made God.**

We don’t study stories about HOLY MEN and HOLY WOMEN very much –as 21<sup>st</sup> century Protestant Christians. Indeed when we encounter two of the holiest people alive today, we give them different names in order to believe that they are not like us.

The gift of Christmas is to realize that **BECOMING HOLY MEN AND WOMEN** is the **GIFT OF CHRISTMAS**. We need to accept it, even though it is a new thing for our minds, and to wait with anticipation for its becoming.

The Sister of the Order of Missionaries of Charity (begun by Mother Teresa) have a little prayer that they pray right after they receive Holy Communion. It would be a good prayer for us to pray each day of this Advent Season – these two weeks until Christmas:

**Dear Jesus, help us to spread Your fragrance everywhere we go. Flood our souls with Your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly that our lives may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through us, and be so in us, that every soul we come in contact with may feel Your presence in our soul. Let them look us and see no longer us, but only Jesus.**

It's a more comprehensive, and obviously more articulate, prayer than the little prayer that I teach the children to pray, on your behalf, whenever I do the children's sermon:

**And watch over the big people, because we're watching them, too.**

Same thing.

It's about **CLAIMING THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS** that God became human to give us.

We don't celebrate the lives of saints too much, as Protestant Christians. Kind of a shame. And when we see one in our midst, we change his or her name, so that we won't be tempted to identify with them.

***But! Wait! Wait just a minute. Maybe ... maybe indeed ... we have gotten a glimmer of it.*** I recall that just a few weeks ago, in this very place, I said that we "get it" here at Saint Marks. I said it on ALL SAINTS SUNDAY. For, on that day, when we remember those hundreds of people with whom we have spent our lifetimes rubbing shoulders, **we have a glimpse of holiness.**

And! (It's a big "and.") And we have a glimpse of what is our very own potential. Like these saints, whom we know by their own name and not by some holy pseudonym, we, too have the potential of going on ... of going on and accepting the gift of Christmas: The divine became human so that we can claim our divinity.

Although I am glad we have that emotional / spiritual catharsis on All Saints Sunday ... it's not limited to that day alone ... or even to the two Sunday we leave the banners hanging in the sanctuary.

Look around you today. Look around and see examples of people living out the prayer prayed by the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity.

**Dear Jesus, help us to spread Your fragrance everywhere we go. Flood our souls with Your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess our**

whole being so utterly that our lives may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through us, and be so in us, that every soul we come in contact with may feel Your presence in our soul. Let them look us and see no longer us, but only Jesus.

Take just a moment. Pause. Think about where you have seen them. [P A U S E]

I think about Joe Morris leaning over his saw cutting out those Nativity figures given out one by one each year, and Linda Bodie lovingly painting them. And in their acts of love, I see **the penetration and possession of their lives as a radiance of Jesus**. They don't have "holy person" pseudonyms. They are just Joe and Linda.

There are many, many examples in this very congregation. I will see several of them again this evening as we go out and sing Christmas carols to shut ins. Again I will see **the penetration and possession of their lives as a radiance of Jesus**. They won't have "holy person" pseudonyms. They will carry the names by which we have always known them.

**The gift of Christmas is that the Divine became human so that humans can claim our divinity.**

Today's scripture talks about farmers who are patient enough to wait for something, because they are pretty sure that it WILL come and it IS worth waiting for.

**THIS CHRISTMAS** I pray that you will anticipate the coming of your Christmas gift from God. I also pray that you will pay attention to those people around you, who are already claiming that gift in their own lives. **REMEMBER: God, please watch over the big people, because we're watching them, too.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.