

Liturgy

John Volkening - 31 December 2006

INTROIT

**Arise, your light is come! The Spirit's call obey;
Show forth the glory of your God which shines on you today!**

CALL TO WORSHIP from Psalm 148

One: Praise God! Praise God from the heavens; praise God in the heights!
Praise God, all you angels of God; praise God all you host of heaven!

**All: Praise God, you sun and moon; praise God, all you shining stars!
Praise God, you skies above, and you vapors high above the clouds!**

One: Let them praise the name of God, for God commanded and they were created.
God set them in their places forever and ever. God made it a law that no one can break.

**All: Praise God from the earth, you fishes, you creatures of the ocean depths,
Fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling God's command!**

One: Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

Wild animals and all domestic animals, crawling things and flying birds!

**All: Rulers of the earth and all people, officials, judges and all leaders of earth!
Young men and women alike, old and young together! Praise be to God!**

HYMN OF PRAISE **Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You**

CALL TO CONFESSION

Merry Christmas everyone.

Some of you may be wondering why we aren't singing any traditional Christmas songs today.

Well, in our gospel reading for today we find a **12 year old** Jesus accompanying his parents to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover.

When the festival ends Jesus' parents begin their return home with a group of travelers, not knowing that Jesus has chosen to remain behind.

After a days journey, Joseph and Mary discover that Jesus is missing and they begin to look for their child among the group. Not finding him they return to Jerusalem and continue their search.

After three days they find their son, Jesus, sitting in the Temple among the teachers listening to them and asking them questions. "All who had heard the young Jesus were amazed at his understanding and his answers."

When his astonished parents see him, Mary asks, "Child why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you with **great anxiety.**"

Jesus responds, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Then Jesus returns home with his shaken, confused and amazed parents.

We have just come through a season that is at once family-centered and yet often full of family tensions, from money problems to old hurts brought to new life, from pressures and misunderstandings to unfulfilled expectations and disillusionment. The people who love one another, often most disappoint and hurt one another.

The lovely image of shepherds and stars and angels singing in the night gives way a week later to anxious parents perplexed at their adolescent son's preoccupation with things above their understanding. Will life ever be the same for any of them, or for us?

Just last week we met the infant Jesus born in a stable, in an occupied land and sleeping in an animal trough. A birth more lowly and humble than anyone could have expected. And today we meet the rebel Jesus who asks, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Luke writes that his parents did not understand what he was talking about, and sometimes I think we probably don't either.

We notice in his question is that Jesus is completely focused on God and lives his life first and foremost in relationship to God. That's what Jesus does throughout his whole life, from 12 years old, to when he is in the Garden of Gethsemani, to when he dies on the cross and surrenders himself to God. He lives completely for God. We, too, are called to live our lives first and foremost in relationship to God, to focus our hearts and energies on God, and to place God first in our lives.

Later in his ministry, Jesus has some interesting things to say about family - about brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers - when they seem to keep us from our call to follow God. Even now, as a child, Jesus cannot be deterred from "God's business." (David will be speaking to this later this in his sermon)

For when family and home draw us into places too safe for growth and too comfortable for giving, we're called to shine the light of the gospel upon both, asking how God is calling us out - out to the unfamiliar, to the risky and the different, out to the places of growth and new life.

Jesus' loyalty and allegiance is to God and doing God's work. Jesus will not do any one else's business or worship any false god. We too must try to be loyal to God first and foremost. But this is hard, because most people in the world are not loyal to God. The culture in this country calls us to proclaim allegiance to America; loyalty to our soldiers, to the works of war, to the president and his project of death. If we are to follow Jesus, we have to renounce that project and nationalism, patriotism, and blindly following the leaders of this world - and do the work of God, and be loyal only to God.

Luke writes that Jesus went back to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and grew in grace and wisdom and age until he was ready to be baptized and proclaim God's reign and walk the way of the cross. This suggests that we too have to grow in grace and wisdom, that we are called to a mature adult Christian faith, which is very hard.

Jesus had to grow in grace and wisdom and so do we. The journey of faith took Jesus to places he never imagined - from the desert with John the Baptist - to the Sea of Galilee with the fishermen - and eventually to Jerusalem and the Temple and his trial and crucifixion.

Many of us grew up thinking that the journey of faith would get easier as we grew older, but the Gospel is trying to tell us that the journey of faith gets harder as we grow older because if we're really following Jesus, we will be led to the cross. The Gospel says we all have to grow up, not just

physically and emotionally, but spiritually as well, which means we have to give our lives more and more to God, and follow Jesus by doing God's work and seeking God's will and God's way of love.

This means walking through the fog into the unknown to the cross, to join Jesus' nonviolent struggle of resistance against evil, to transform and disarm this world.

Isn't that why we're here today? - Because we **are** seeking God's reign of love and peace on earth. So today the Gospel invites us to grow up with Jesus, to be about God's work, to live in relationship with God, to be loyal to God and to do God's will no matter what anyone else says, no matter what the government or the world proclaims.

Yes this is difficult, but if we dare grow up spiritually, we **will** be the mature, beloved sons and daughters of God.

As we begin this New Year, we are still growing, still seeking God's guidance and wisdom for the direction of the life we share together...

As a congregation, we have again and again been called to be about God's work in a way that takes us out of our comfort zone. And again we are called to show to the world that together, we have heard Jesus' words in the temple.

One way we can now demonstrate our love of God - and of all God's people - is by participating in the upcoming "Occupation Project." This is one clear way that we can say we won't be about our current government's project of death, but instead we will write our governmental representatives letters, we will call them on the phone, we will visit them in their offices, and demand that they stop funding the war and occupation in Iraq... and if they don't listen - we will occupy their offices and risk arrest, until they promise to stop funding this illegal and immoral war.

Let us be about God's work.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION **The Ecumenical Millennium Prayer**

Almighty God, we lift our hearts to You in praise and thanksgiving. Out of love You created the heavens and the earth, and breathed life into this world. Inspire us to treasure this gift in all our relationships: with You, with each other and with all creation. Out of love You gave us your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, as Light for our world. Ignite in us the passion of disciples and the courage to strive for justice and peace among the rich diversity of race and culture. Often we have strayed from You. In your mercy, grant us forgiveness. By your power, strengthen us to do your will. Out of love You sent us the Spirit, your own first gift for those who believe. Instill in us a right spirit, that we might bear your light and love. Gracious God, as this new year dawns, enkindle the fire of love in this and every place. Fill us with hope, wisdom, joy and peace, that we may be faithful unto the ages of ages. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

May we find our assurance in these words from Colossians 3:12-17 :

As God's children, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.

And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God through him.

PASSING THE PEACE

We are called to abound in love for one another and for all, just as God abounds in love for us.

It is our care for each other, the love between us that keeps this community vibrant and alive. Let's let some of that love and care show now by passing the peace and greeting each other saying, **"the peace of God be yours."**

HYMN OF ASSURANCE **Let There Be Light, O God of Hosts**