

# 2nd Sunday of Christmas

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*Sunday, January 3, 2021*

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**Isaiah 66:10-14; Psalm 66:1-9; Galatians 6: [1-6], 7-16; LUKE 10:1-11, 16-20**

What was...what is...and what is to come...

We are constantly teasing out this tri-fold view of our lives.

What happened in 2020?

What IS HAPPENING as we begin a new year?

What WILL BE as we dive headfirst into 2021?

Last year, we lost over 300,000 loved ones, due to COVID-19 related illnesses. Parents / Children / Friends...

We encountered a virus unlike the world has ever seen. We saw terrible political strife over an election that – I think – has been completed. We are more aware than ever of shootings of innocent black and brown peoples.

We've also seen people at their best: Nurses, doctors, front-line workers, who continue to serve in dangerous conditions, who are now receiving vaccinations for COVID-19. Educators across this nation are to be applauded for their work as they – who gathered in-person – were also at risk every day they entered the classrooms

And for our pastors and deacons...who are trying to do CHURCH – to be followers of Jesus and shepherds for God's people, who are trying to be God's people in the midst of a pandemic

We give many, many thanks for council presidents, for our youth leaders, and our Sunday School teachers...bet you didn't start 2020 wondering how to teach the Christmas story over Zoom. This virus has challenged us...has forced us to re-consider...and to re-imagine...what it means to be the Church.

You have had no choice, but to re-think the answer to questions like:

“What does it mean for God to be with us?”

“How do we be the church in a digital space?”

Even as we consider these questions, we know – from our ancestors in the faith – that somehow, somehow, God is WITH US!

We may not have felt or thought we had seen God in 2020...but God has been with us, is with us, and will be with us. Jesus, Emmanuel – God with us - is God’s way of reminding us that God is here!

In the heights of our heights and in the depths of our depths, Jesus is still God; Jesus is with us.

Jesus experienced the joy of hearing God say, “You are my Son, the beloved, with you I am well please.” And yet Jesus also ends up down on the cross, saying “God, why have you forsaken me?”

Looking further back into the history of God’s people, we see that our ancestors in the faith have had their own valleys to walk through. Jeremiah – one of God’s prophets – God’s voice to God’s people as they are exiled from their homeland. Jeremiah gives a word of hope in the depths of *their* despair

Many of God’s people have been scattered to the four winds...to distant lands...and yet, in the midst of *that*...in the midst of *their* exile, God has Jeremiah share these words of hope, in Jeremiah 31:

*With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.*

Imagine hearing these words of God’s prophet, Jeremiah, back when this Babylonian exile occurred...

That through all of the years of HELL that you have experienced, now you get these words of hope?

Would you doubt? Would you believe? Would these words bring a sense of relief? Could you sense that your mourning would turn into joy??? Tough to say...when you’re in the midst of the mourning and sadness...

In this Christmas season, a lesson like this reminds us, that God is still with us. God has NOT abandoned us. And that takes FAITH that God is still here beside us...and the Good News is that we can look to our baptism, or to the Table, and see and taste God's salvation.

From the prophet Jeremiah...we move to the Gospel of John, where we encounter another truth - a truth that is hard to believe: that God has come into our very space on earth - A LIGHT in the DARKNESS

John (1:14) reveals a word to us that the "Word became flesh and lived among us." This Word is full "of grace and truth." "From Jesus' fullness, we have all received, grace upon grace."

In Jesus the game changes. In Jesus, redemption is close at hand. The people to whom Jeremiah was speaking also had that same grace available to them, too! It looked different, but that same grace applies

Whether it is the year 597 BC, or the year "ZERO," or the year 2021, the same grace from God applies regardless of the year we've had, we still know that God is with us.

God brings us close. God heals our wounds in time through friends and loved ones, through water, bread, and wine, through the Gospel preached and prayers lifted. Through standing up for justice for all people.

God has come to us to be one with us and has called us forth to serve...to do the work God has called us to...

This work is reflected in the poem by Howard Thurman, "The Work of Christmas":

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.

Folks, it's time to roll our sleeves up for 2021...to do the work of Christmas...of praying for the homeless, and then going out and feeding them...of praying for peace, and then supporting legislation that leads to building of relationships and safety for ALL people...of saying that we love our neighbor, and then bringing them a freshly baked loaf of bread or a pot of soup.

God calls ALL people together to do this work that all might know that God was with us yesterday...that God is with us this very moment...and that God will –indeed – be with us, always.

Amen!