

The First Sunday after Christmas

December 30, 2012

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalm 147 or 147:13-21

Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7

John 1:1-18

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Some years ago, when I was a brand new Deacon, I served at a church in Augusta. There was a Christmas pageant; one of those when Christmas and Epiphany are blended into one, with shepherds and sheep and wise men and camels, all vying for space next to the manger of the infant Jesus. And, of course, the angels: in this instance several dozen little girls in white robes with shiny silver haloes and glittery, glittery wings. Perhaps you know that glitter, once present, can never, never be removed from carpets or clothing; it is eternal.

There were a similar number of little boys, shepherds with robes and head scarves, whom someone had given sticks to carry. The floor of the sanctuary was stone, slate. The first stick fell with a resounding crash onto the floor; the rest followed.

Despite all this, Joseph and Mary, slightly older and thus more sophisticated, remained in pious adoration of the baby Jesus; that year, there being no babies of appropriate age, He was symbolized by a baby doll wrapped in swaddling clothes.

We progressed. Then a little girl, seated with her mother halfway back on the right side of the aisle, realized that the baby Jesus was, in fact,

her doll; nobody had consulted her! Her mother was just a second too slow to stop her from indignantly marching up the aisle, taking her doll from the manger and marching back to her seat.

Mary and Joseph didn't move. The shepherds and angels were delighted. And the pageant went on.

Now, lest you think that there is no point to this story and that I am rambling nostalgically, I must say that as the years have gone by, I have come to the conclusion that the little girl had it right. We really shouldn't leave Jesus in the manger; we are supposed to take Jesus with us.

That is why we hear the familiar, and powerful, beginning of the Gospel of John this morning: "In the beginning . . ." The very words are designed to call our thoughts back to the opening of the Book of Genesis, the onset of creation.

John's Gospel stands apart from Matthew, Mark and Luke; it was written much later. John assumes that we know a part of the story, that we know of the earthly, human Jesus. He assumes that we know of the nativity stories of Matthew and Luke, about a shining star and hosts of angels; about the Magi and camels and gold, frankincense and myrrh. We read John to complete the story.

John speaks of the divine Jesus. John tells us that in the Nativity, in Christmas, we celebrate the Incarnation, the presence of the creative Word of God here in this world. Without John we might well see Christmas as just a yearly pageant, sweet and sentimental and all very familiar. Without John, we are in danger of trivializing the most significant event in the history of creation. Without John, we might well leave the baby Jesus in the manger from year to year, just another decoration to be brought out and be submerged in the midst of giant inflatable Santas and Snowmen.

Christmas isn't just a day on the calendar; Christmas isn't just a season. Christmas is our ongoing, never-ending, heart-felt gratitude for God's loving presence in our lives and a joy-filled celebration of His Blessed Incarnation.

In His Holy Name.