

“Christmas Eve: Carols & Candles”

Pastor Andy CastroLang

December 24, 2019

Scripture:

Luke 2:1-14

1 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

Sermon:

I never celebrated with carols and candles as a child. No, not like this. Instead, I went to “high mass” at midnight, in a cathedral. There was singing, yes, very solemn singing, and lots of incense, and men up front dressed in cloth of gold.

Maybe you grew up with another tradition in worship, maybe you never wandered out to worship on Christmas Eve, at all.

Yet, here we are now.

And we are called to celebrate and be glad, as the angels announced a birth.

We do it with candles (and glow sticks for the littlest children!) and many carols and songs. We do it with decorations all around, and gentle light, and joyous scripture.

When you leave here, you will be offered a candy cane, a miniature shepherds crook...a sweet reminder of Jesus: our Messiah, our Savior, who is the Good Shepherd of us all, who grew up and became the healer, the teacher, the leader, the ransom offered for us whom he called his friends.

Yes, we celebrate; the baby grew up!

Grew up to lead us back to Gods love and mercy, God’s design for the well-being of the world, and the true peace that the world so desperately hungers for.

The baby grew up, and what will you celebrate? That the child who was born poor, among an oppressed people, gave us the message of God’s call to liberation, for abundance of life and joy and peace?

Will you celebrate Jesus, the giver of God’s healing power, in your life?

Will you celebrate that the baby grew up and became the man, who in giving his life for us, showed us that we need have no fear, not even fear of death, for Jesus our Christ, vanquished death in his resurrection life?

The baby grew up, how will you celebrate?

In ancient times, the church settled on this time of year for the great celebration of the baby's birth.

- We know with certainty that the great solstice of Winter had been celebrated for long years before *this* birth day began to be celebrated.
- In that ancient pagan celebration there would be big bonfires built on the hillsides to lighten the longest night.
- And our ancient forebears would feast, and sing, play games, hold skits and plays.
- They would give gifts,
- and they would hang green to remind them of the return of life's energy as the world rolled on toward Spring.
- And, they would greet one another with the words, "I give you light for the year."

But now we, we feast, and we trim our homes with green, and we sing, and we give gifts... and we say, "I give you Christ, the Light of the World."

Even as the ancients celebrated, we can celebrate too!

In olden times, folks were known to celebrate for twelve merry days!

Christians still celebrate, in countless ways around the world...singing, dancing, feasting and sharing love and kindness to each other, and to the stranger, to the lonely, to the friendless, the homeless, the sick and suffering.

Celebrating the baby who came to upset thrones and kingdoms, turn the tables on loss and suffering; restore health and joy, and conquer death in the name of God's life.

- So, there is singing in hot and sunny Australia,
- and dancing in Africa,
- and feasting in the British Isles.
- People gift one another with books and chocolate to read through the long Christmas Eve night in Iceland,
- they hang greens and trim trees in Germany,
- there is the scented smoke of swinging incense in the glow of candlelight at Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity in Israel.
- There are parades in Ecuador,
- and prayers with the pope in the Vatican.

- Skating at the Rockefeller Center under the giant tree.
- And the fabulous “Weihnachtsmarkt” in Erfurt, Germany.

Hot chocolate, turkey, sauerkraut, ugali, sushi, beer!

Everywhere Christians celebrate the birth of the Christ Child.

The babe who grew to be a man, and changed the world forever, giving us joy and hope, healing, and gladness; and the imperishable knowledge of God’s love!

I pray your heart lifts in celebration in every possible joyful and meaningful way!

And remember these words of the medieval mystic Hildegard von Bingen and take them to heart:

“Be not lax in celebrating, be not lazy in the festive service of our God.”

Alleluia!