

Advent Midweek Vespers – 2020
The Incarnation and the Past
Revelation 1:1-8
John 8:48-59

Every now and then, on the internet, you will see a photograph, a 1920's photograph of a woman walking in downtown New York holding a cell phone up to her ear. What's *her* story? Is she a time traveler? Is the photograph doctored? Does she drive a stainless-steel DeLorean? Does she know Doc Brown?

Back in the day, one of my favorite movies was *The Final Countdown* (Kirk Douglas, Martin Sheen and James Farentino). The USS Nimitz, an aircraft carrier, gets caught in a mysterious storm as it leaves Pearl Harbor for the Pacific Ocean. Eerily, it is transported back to December 6th, 1941. Science fiction and ethics converge as the stars of the movie wrestle with the implications of decimating the approaching Japanese fleet with their superior American firepower. We have a fascination with time travel, from H.G. Wells' book *The Time Machine* to the romantic film *The Time Traveler's Wife* – we return to the topic over and over.

What we are dealing with tonight is not science fiction. What we are dealing with tonight is divine truth. Let's start simply. God is eternal. Without beginning and without end – God is, God ever has been, God ever shall be. You are a temporal creature. You live within time. You live within that which God Himself created, a dimension that sprang from His creative will. You live within time. God does not. He exists outside of time, beyond it, ungoverned by it. God is eternal. Time has no effect on Him. Time does not change Him nor is God bound by its constraints. He uses it. He uses it to advantage – our advantage. Time is His tool, His servant, His method... for good.

Put these two Bible passages in your mind and think about God's use of time. "There was evening and there was morning, the first day" (Genesis 1:5). "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (Galatians 4:4-5). The fullness of time... isn't that a marvelous expression? When time itself became fully pregnant, God sent forth His Son – conceived and born into this chronological world. When God had done all that He *could do* to prepare the arrival for His Beloved Son into our broken world, the eternal Father then sent the eternal Son into time.

Let's do it again. "There was evening and morning, the first day." "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son." When God created time, that first day, He had in mind sending His Son into this world. The fullness of time is the precise point (**raison d'être**) of *creating it* – to send His eternal Son into it to claim you, to redeem and save you. Do you know what Jesus' first words are in the Gospel of Mark? "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). From the first day, time marched forward until all things were ready for God to be incarnated, for God to come and establish His kingdom, for God to come and fill time with His presence. Time is a supremely wonderful gift, a divine reality that is infused with God's own purposes. Time is not a wooden structure that narrows life. Time is fuller than what we think.

Henry Ford, the great auto maker, said this about history: “History is just one damn thing after another.” Don’t believe it. Heck, I’m like you. Some days I see time as my enemy. Arthritis, wrinkles, and the forgotten bloom of youth. With each passing year, our culture seems more distant from the things that made it exemplary. Unembarrassed academic rigor, a blue-collar work ethic that inspired young men, an unquestioned respect for elders, and police, and those who served the common good. Time has not been our friend. Ah, but that is a worldly perspective. Advent calls us to think differently. Christ fills history. Here is what the angles said: “**Today** in the town of David a savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). Christ invades time and brings us grace as He comes. To the thief who died in faith, time was rich with Jesus’ favor. “Truly, I say to you, **today** you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). It was GOOD FRIDAY when Jesus died. It was the THIRD DAY when He rose again. This is the Year of our Lord 2020. Holy history is our history. Time has been sanctified by God Himself, sanctified by God coming into this world and giving Himself to us temporal creatures.

Y’all know what quicksilver is, right? Mercury – Hg on the periodic table of elements; the only metallic element that is liquid at standard conditions for temperature and pressure. They named it quicksilver because of its color and the fact that it will zip around, that it’s difficult to corral, difficult to pin down. God being made man is like quicksilver in time. Do you believe that you are a direct beneficiary of Christmas 2000 years after it took place? Do you see yourself very much akin to the shepherds who ran with haste to “see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us” (Luke 2:15)? I certainly hope that you do for that is all quite true. Why is that the case? Because Christ fills time. He invades every era. He invades every age of the church, every generation of believers, every epoch of man – the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us – Christ fills time with His life, fills time with His death, fills time with His resurrection.

Quicksilver – you can put it in a thermometer but once it’s out, once it’s on the loose, it’s going to go wherever it wants. Christ’s life, His incarnation, God being made man – it is the theological center of God’s love. 2000 years after the fact, it comes to us in all of its power. Ah, but not only forward in time – Christmas went backward. The Jews were Christians. Believing Jews were saved by the blood of Christ which had yet to be shed; but by that blood they were made righteous before God. Time, as we know it and as we live it, doesn’t hinder God’s work. In the Sacrificial system of ancient Israel, the Son of God was present to give His redeeming blood. Forgiveness for those who sinned. Hope for those who sought God’s face. Deliverance from death for all of Abraham’s children. Abraham knew it. Abraham saw Christ’s day. Abraham knew that God’s Day was unbound by time. Jesus said it with astounding clarity: “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58).

I listen to KUSC – classical music, 91.5 on the FM dial. I heard something that struck me the other day. The program host said that people have said that they listen to KUSC in order to escape. I can relate. We have a multitude of diversions. Our favorite tv programs, social media, hobbies of various sort. The host said that we certainly need vehicles to escape in because of the times. Do we, as Christians, really want to escape the times or do we want to learn what is within time, where Christ is, what time brings us, how to flourish within it? We have become worldly minded – too much. Our faith is too often a fallback position instead of something we lead with. Time is full, right now, for us. St. Paul writes this: “In a favorable time I listened to

you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). God has filled time with the person of His Son and we do not need to escape. He is present, as He has always been, with His incarnation. You are His manger. In this moment, you are His manger. He is using this era, the time in which we live, to your advantage. He is bringing you through time, day by day, to your eternal destiny. He is bringing you through time for He is within it, filling it with His love, day by day, and blessing you. Christ makes time beautiful. He has put eternity in your heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11).