

Lectionary B December 28, 2014 First Sunday in Christmas
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana
Roberta Meyer

Isaiah 61:10-62:3
Psalm 148
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:22-40

Amazement and Praise

Looking through the eyes of a seventeen month old at Christmas is an awesome thing. That's how old my granddaughter, Korbin is. Every time she sees something new, from lights on a Christmas tree, to a shiny rock in the driveway her whole body expresses sheer joy and amazement. Ohhhhh!

She was so excited last Sunday at her church during the children's lesson when the pastor brought out a manger with baby Jesus in it. She came up to the front of church for the first time by herself and wanted to hold baby Jesus. The wise pastor let Korbin hold baby Jesus during the worship service. I wasn't there but I can hear her little gasps of wonder and well, I think it is her way of praising God.

That's what this first Sunday in Christmas is about. Being amazed and praising God.

We are invited to Praise God.

We are invited to praise God with everything in creation. That means joining with every slithering, slimy thing that breathes, every monstrous sharp-toothed creature, every rash causing, prickly vegetation, every tsunamic thunder booming storm.

The Psalm we read today calls all of creation from angels in heaven to the sea creatures in the ocean depths to come together praising God.

If you think about it, what other response is there to this Christmas miracle we are given—God coming down as a little baby—God being born among the barn animals and smells. God joining our humanness in order to redeem us as adopted children of God! That baby was nailed to the cross, died and rose from the dead, conquering our sins. There are no words. Just, “OOOOH!” Like Korbin would put it.

So this morning I would like to put ourselves in that place among all God's creation, a place of awe as we meditate on this Christmas wonder.

Our psalm today calls for praise from all created pieces of this universe. Reading from the Message Bible it says,

*“Praise GOD from heaven,
praise him from the mountaintops;
Praise him, all you his angels,
praise him, all you his warriors,
Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, you morning stars;
Praise him, high heaven,
praise him, heavenly rain clouds;*

*It goes on... Praise GOD from earth,
you sea dragons, you fathomless ocean deeps;
Fire and hail, snow and ice,
hurricanes obeying his orders;
Mountains and all hills,
apple orchards and cedar forests;
Wild beasts and herds of cattle,
snakes, and birds in flight;*

*Earth's kings and all races,
leaders and important people,
Robust men and women in their prime,
and yes, graybeards and little children.*

You see what this praising is doing? When we join all of God's creation in praising God, we are leveling the playing field. When every living breathing thing praises God, we all become equal. God is lifted up and we along with the snakes and sea monsters are joining together as God's loved creation.

But there is something else. As humans we do have a special responsibility in praising God. We are unique because we alone are created in God's image. That gives us a duty in praising God to help God take care of all of creation. As we look at this world we live in we are called to always gaze through the eyes of a toddler, never taking anything in this world for granted, to always seeing the wonder in everything God has created, a raindrop on the window, the power of the wind, a small crawling bug, a magnificent whale in the ocean.

Isaiah tells us we are clothed *"with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."* We are dressed to praise God!

Galatians tells us we are adopted as children of God! How wonderful. "Ooooooh!" "Halleluiah!"

In our Gospel we look in as Mary and Joseph are amazed at the attention and praise their infant son is receiving in the temple by two very old and wise people. Simeon and Anna, in their old age recognize God in the person of their little baby boy. "Ooooh!" Praise God! What else can be said?

Wait a minute. There are times when we don't feel happy, or like praising God. There are things in this world that are ugly, scary, and downright evil. Yes, and Simeon and Anna could say the same thing. Remember Herod? About this time is when King Herod was slaughtering innocent children. Simeon and Anna were right in pointing the attention to praising God during that time. God is the only hope for combating evil.

That same kind of evil exists today and will until Jesus' second coming. Our children are being slaughtered at the hands of terrorists in Pakistan and other parts of the world and right here in our own communities. Last week near my home a 17 month old toddler was killed by a young man taking care of him while his mother was working. The whole situation is so ugly, so revolting. What can we do? Let me read to you what the sister of the young man who killed this baby said the day after this catastrophe:

"The past 24hrs has been the hardest of my life. I have had Every emotion possible! Life will never be the same as we once knew it. What we need to do ... is come together, comfort each other and figure out how each and everyone of us can make sure this NEVER happens to a child or family again! May God bring peace to our hearts and community!"

Looking to God. Praising God, even or especially in our grief and tears is where we find security in times of disaster and tragedy. Knowing all the individuals involved are in God's arms is comforting. Like this young woman says, God is our hope for peace.

This world is awesome and terrible at the same time. All we can do is live as God's children, clothed in the protection of

salvation, and praise our Creator along with everything that has breath in this world. Let's look at this sweet baby in the manger, and through the eyes of a toddler, express our awestruck praise! Amen.