

Christmas Eve - Year C
December 24, 2009, 8:00 PM
The Reverend Brett P. Backus

“Constant Christmas”

Luke 2:1-14

“I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

This evening's Gospel message is about presence. It is about our belief in the true and constant presence of Christ in each of our lives and in this world.

Looking out of my window seat, I could not decide whether to cry out of fear and hit my knees in prayer, or to smile and admire the immense beauty of the jungle surrounding our bus. I imagine my facial expression as being both full of sheer terror and yet totally amazed as I constantly switched from covering my eyes to sticking my head out of the window for a better view. Looking down at the intense cliffs that the tires of our bus so delicately straddled, I realized that I could not see the end of the lush green jungle landscape below us. Bottom? There was no bottom.

I have been down the world's most dangerous road. Seriously. If you go on the Internet and Google “the world's most dangerous road,” pictures of an incredibly insane yet beautiful road in Bolivia will immediately pop up for your viewing pleasure. The Bolivian road, practically world famous now, is a small 50 mile stretch that is responsible for about 200 deaths a year. Because of the many dangers encountered along this narrow, two-way traffic road, it has also been given the most appropriate and well-deserved name, “the death road,” Yes, I went down the death road.

So, at this point, I am sure you are all saying, “ok, that is a pretty cool story Brett, but what in the world does that have to do with Christmas and this evening's Gospel?” Well, I wish I knew. No, this evening's Gospel reading actually made me recall my experience on the world's most dangerous road. Not so much because of my own experience exactly, but more because of what I ended up witnessing in the people around me at that time. You see, while I had to basically be tricked into going down such a road (My wife Carla and her

family who frequently traveled that road told me, “Oh, don't worry, it's just a little dangerous,”) for everyone else, traveling down the death road was actually just a simple act of faith.

For many, traveling such a dangerous road was the only way to get to where they needed to go in that part of Bolivia, and so there was no other choice but to get on that bus and simply place their trust in God. So you see, for them, the death road was less about fear and worry, and more about knowing and believing that Jesus truly abided with and guided each of them on their way. I know this to be true because of the fact that throughout this entire experience, as other passengers realized just how frightened I really was, they seemed surprised and then began to constantly tell me things like, “We are in the Lord's hands, He will protect us,” and “You must have faith.” Of course, all the while I am sitting there thinking: Faith!?! Are you nuts?!?! God gave you a brain too, you should really consider using it sometime!!!!

Needless to say, at that time, I did not know what to make of those faithful people surrounding me. It seemed to me like they were just testing God in a way by deciding to take such huge risks. However, when I began to reflect on this experience as I was preparing for this evening's sermon, I started to realize something. I realized that the people surrounding me that day in that rickety old bus were not actually as crazy as I had originally thought, but rather, that those faith filled people truly understood something about living as Christians, and about this evening's Gospel, and even in some weird way about Christmas that I and perhaps most of us could benefit from hearing. They understood, and whole heartedly believed in, the true and constant presence of Christ in each of our individual lives and in this world.

You see, that after all is what this night, this entire season of celebration, and this evening's Gospel are really all about. They all point us to a message about the presence of Christ, about the coming of God into this world to live and walk among us, about God taking the form of a vulnerable, innocent, human child simply in order to be reunited with and closer to His Creation. Now, I know that in these days, this message is all too often drowned out by all the other things that go along with the Christmas season in our culture: the busyness, over consumption, the stress, decorating, traffic, the shopping, worry, excitement, the in laws. Yet, somehow, Christ is the reason behind all of this. When we so carefully decorate our homes, when we exchange thoughtful gifts with our loved ones, when we speak of the coming of the Christ child, even when we say a simple Merry Christmas, what we are really talking about, the message that is actually being communicated and that lies behind

all those good intentions, is the message of the true and constant presence, the real presence of Christ our Savior, of God, in each of our lives and in this world.

Our Gospel lesson this evening is of course about the birth of Jesus. It is about the coming of the one who would be the fulfillment of the prophecies, the redeemer and savior of the world, the Messiah, and it is of course that birth that we gather here to celebrate tonight. Just as with every Christmas, we gather here tonight to celebrate our belief that indeed Jesus the Christ was at one time born into this world, a being, both fully human and fully divine, and laid into a humble manger. And yet, this evening, and this Gospel are about so much more. In a strange way, what this evening is really about is what we Christians experience when we find ourselves at various times in our lives in the middle of our very own “world's most dangerous road.”

It is about our ability as Christians, as believers, to be lifted up by our belief and to look to Christ, understanding that when we find ourselves in those tough situations where we are in some kind of danger, or we are lost, and we have no control, that Christ Jesus indeed is in this world, and that He truly is the light which guides, illuminates, and accompanies us on all our paths and in all our situations. You see, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Christmas is not only about remembering and celebrating our belief that Christ Jesus came into our world one night many years ago. Christmas is about remembering, understanding, and celebrating our belief that since His coming into this world, Jesus the Christ has always and indeed continues to walk with us, in us, and among us every moment of our lives. Jesus is present. That is what my friends on the death road taught me, and that is the message I want to share with you all this Christmas eve. The birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not merely some isolated event that we gather together to remember and to celebrate once a year in our churches. Rather, the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is an event that we as Christians are to be in celebration about constantly and with the understanding that through it, the very fabric of our existence as human beings and the very nature of our relationship with God has been eternally changed for the better from that moment on. Jesus is present. God is with us. Merry Christmas!

“I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

Amen.