



The Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder

December 18, 2011

### ***Advent IV Year B***

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

As we began today's service we prayed in the Collect for Advent IV: "Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ may find in us a mansion prepared for himself..." With the incarnation, came as well a new understanding of God and the possibility of a brand new relationship through Jesus Christ. Is there a mansion, a room, a place within us for this new relationship? It is interesting that one of the readings for our Burial Office is from John 14 which states: *In my Father's house there are many mansions...* Again, we see the reciprocal relationship between God and the individual, that when we have a mansion for God in our hearts, God promises us a mansion in heaven. What is it to have a mansion in our heart for God?

When I imagine a mansion I visualize a very large structure with many rooms, wide-open spaces, and perhaps beautiful gardens, pastures, and vistas that surround it. I think of a place that accommodates diversity and differences...and something that is comfortable with a bit of mystery; we cannot take it all in at once.

I believe God wanted our hearts to be unlimited when it comes to Jesus and God's people...if you will, it is a union. Franciscan priest and theologian, Richard Rohr, has written: *Once we realize this union, life changes radically. Trees start shining, and we notice God's fingerprints everywhere...Remember, true religion (re-ligio, re-ligament) binds it all back together again. This is an immediate result of authentic religious experience, and why it brings such lasting joy. (On The Threshold of Transformation, p.195)*

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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It was the vision of the prophet Isaiah that spoke of this exciting relationship: “For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” The prophet further proclaimed that the whole of humanity who had walked in darkness had their darkness lifted by the light of God—“on them light has shined.” Yet, even Isaiah inspired by God, could not have imagined the prophetic magnitude of his words.

The angel Gabriel speaks, *Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and he will be called the Son of the Most High...* (Luke 1) In Jesus Christ, the very essence of God is revealed to humanity. God becomes man, so that humanity (we) might come closer to fulfilling the intent of being created in the image of God and find union with God.

“Then Mary said, *Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.* Mary says yes to give birth to Jesus and simultaneously yes to the birth of the salvation of God. With Mary’s “yes,” God’s plan for the world was realized—the salvation of God for God’s children was fulfilled. Succinctly said: God loved us...God knew that we were sinners...Sin separates us from God...We cannot save ourselves from sin...So Jesus came to remove that barrier of sin...Now, we have the possibility of living our lives in the present and eternally with our Lord God. We are

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given the opportunity of fulfilling the Genesis intent of being created *Imago-Deo*, and finding union with our Creator God.

If you did not believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, born to Mary and Joseph some 2000 years ago in a stable for your salvation, you most likely would not be here worshipping. Still, can you carry your faith further so that this Christmas can be life changing—a new day? Can we, like Mary, say, *Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.* Have you considered what an act of faith that was for Mary? What will our response be? The true test of our encounter with God in Christ during this season is how we respond after the presents are unwrapped, the tree, lights, and holly come down, and the Christmas season is over. Will it have made a difference, or will it simply be a sentimental memory? Can we open our hearts and the depths of our souls to Jesus Christ and God’s salvation through Him? Can we like Mary be servants of the Lord? What is our “yes” to God that will bring us closer to having a mansion within ourselves for Jesus Christ?

***Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation that your Son Jesus Christ may find in us a mansion prepared for himself...Amen.***

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