

Homily for Christmas Day 2021

25 December, 2021

The Waiting is Over by the Rev. Ernie Lewis

We've all been waiting!

The Church marks time with two periods of waiting.

Each anticipates one of the great interventions by God in the natural course of human history: God acting in decisive ways!

The first waiting: Advent, precedes Christmas; the Birth of Jesus; God made flesh come to dwell among us, as one of us.

The second: Lent, anticipates Easter; Resurrection; God overcoming, once and for all, the power of death and human sinfulness.

Both originated in a world in chaos.

Advent: apocalypse, earthquakes, war, and pestilence.

We too are living in a world of chaos.

But wait!

Listen carefully! There's a sound: the sound of a newborn baby, snuffling and gurgling as he nurses eagerly.

His mother hums to him gently, lovingly.

His father, pacing, quietly speaks to her, "Don't worry! All will be well".

There's old woman bent with age, a stranger who "just showed up". She knows how to do "these things", and putters around briskly, cleaning up, occasionally peeking at the baby to be sure all is well. She reassuringly pats

the father on the arm. She's borne 13 babies of her own, has buried 4, and been present at the births of dozens more through the years. She always just seems to know when and where to just "show up", even with strangers!

It's a lovely scene! We want it to be like this always!

We never want it to change!

But we know better.

Outside a cold wind out of the North whips up dust and trash.

A pack of skinny, hungry dogs roams the streets looking for garbage.

The town is filled with refugees, all frightened and scrambling to find lodging because of the orders of the occupying superpower that has taken over their country.

The main regional head of that superpower fumes and frets in his palace terrified of assassination and insurrection. He's paranoid, poised to strike and kill at the first sign of any perceived threat to his power.

It's a cold, bitter, dangerous world outside that idyllic scene.

We all know the story well or we wouldn't be here this morning!

We've all taken time out from opening gifts and all the rest of the flurry of activities that this day inevitably involves.

But we *ARE HERE!*

In this quiet place..... *together.*

We're here because we know that we have received yet *another* gift!

It's not like any of the other gifts we've received!

It's a gift that's been in preparation since the world was formed out of dark, watery chaos of nothingness!

And what is it??

It's the gift of *life!*

It's the gift of belonging to the human family!

It's the gift of new life; life in relationship with God.

It's the gift of assurance that Creator God who formed human beings out of the dust of the earth has sent into the world the One who connected the waiting of Advent to the climax of waiting of LentChristmas to Easter.....all in the birth of that baby! That baby, flesh and blood, muscle and tendon, skin, brain and heart.... just like us.....!

The baby's name?.....Jesus!

To be human is a gift, because it means that God's own heart can beat within us. We can love as Jesus loves and we can rejoice in being membersall of us.....of the same family; *GOD'S OWN FAMILY!*

That makes us all sisters and brothers!

In the good times and in the bad times, "for better or worse", we are sisters and brothers! No one is left out! The distinctions we invent simply don't apply!

WOW! THINK ABOUT THAT!

And, yes, there's a paradox in all this. This gift, this Jesus, loves us who make up his human family enough to die for us.

That's what Christmas is all about!

It's about the ultimate Gift!

Some of the gifts you may receive this Christmas have a tags or slips of paper that say, "Some Assembly Required", or "refrigerate after opening", or "cold wash only", or even "Batteries not included"!

There are no instructions like that with the Jesus gift. It's fully assembled and ready to go!

And yet, there *is* something else about it: if we put the gift up on a shelf somewhere or bury it at the bottom of the sock drawer ,and never really learn how to use and benefit from it.....never examine it, never try it out, never really ""get"" the thought behind the giver in choosing that particular gift, we will never know the difference it might make in our lives.

What a shame that would be!

Same with Jesus!

There's the joy of sharing the gift with other people.

There's using the gift to reach out in love to those other humans that are also part of the big human creation thing (that would be EVERYBODY!)

There's the joy of reaching out in love to *ALL OF CREATION*; plants and animals, from tiny seeds to Giant Sequoias, plankton to whales, snowflakes to glaciers!

AND:

There's receiving the bread and wine that are the evidence of his real presence and which we take into ourselves as we gather in his name.

Draw Mary's baby very close this day to remain with you as you get to know this gift better and better. Use it in service with the love that he offers to each one of us and the love of the One who gave him to us!

"Joy to the World!

the Lord is come:

let earth receive her King;

let every heart prepare him room,

and heaven and nature sing!"

Merry Christmas!

Amen!

