

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Dec 27th 2017

Feast of Saint John, Apostle and evangelist

I was surprised when I saw that the Gospel reading today is about Easter, since it's still Christmas. I understand it's the feast day of St. John the Apostle, but it's also Christmas season and it felt a little like season jumping. But I went to hear Handel's Messiah during Advent, and while it's become a Christmas season standard, Handel envisioned it as an Easter performance and it was first performed at Easter. The action of the oratorio starts before Christmas and goes through Easter. What I mean is that the ideas of Christmas and Easter can and should co-exist. Christmas needs Easter.

If it wasn't for Easter, there wouldn't be Christmas. Easter is sort of the reason for the Christmas season. Christmas is special because the baby is the son of God who will grow up to save the world by his death and resurrection. It's that resurrection that makes this birth special. Without Easter, there's no Christmas. Of course, without Christmas there's no Easter. The church calendar encompasses the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega.

Every winter - here in the Northern hemisphere - we celebrate the birth of the baby who will grow up to save us. Every spring we celebrate his death and resurrection - his everlasting life that gives us everlasting life. The carol "What Child Is this?" has an Easter verse, "Nails, spears shall pierce him through, the cross he bore for me, for you." The carol "Mary did you know?" references the things baby Jesus grows up to do. We need to acknowledge where this story goes. I think it's good to think about Easter at Christmas. The birth we celebrate now is important because this birth leads to the end of death. Jesus had to be born so he could grow up to die on the cross. And he had to come back from death to give us all everlasting life. In the Gospel today Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved went to the tomb. The tomb was empty and the burial cloths were there. The disciple saw the empty tomb and believed. We have seen the baby in the manger. In the spring we will see his death on the cross, and like the disciples will see the empty tomb. And we believe.

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