

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Dec 23rd 2018

Contemplating the Visitation with Zechariah

It's almost Christmas. My family always celebrates on Christmas Eve and that's when we open presents, so it's really almost Christmas for me. Christmas is tomorrow with my family. All through Advent we've all been waiting and watching. I've been reading an Advent calendar book – it has a dated essay for each day leading up to Christmas. I gave my nephew's boy a chocolate Advent calendar. It continues a tradition. The season has its own challenges – trying to get grading done and grades in, preparing for Christmas by decorating and buying presents, travelling. And with all the stress it can be overwhelming and distracting. I've been stressed and distracted. It's sometimes hard to stay focused on the goal. I read something recently, maybe in the online retreat group, maybe in the Advent book (I've been stressed and distracted) about why the Christmas carols say "The Lord is come" and "Christ is born" instead of "The Lord has come" or "Christ was born." I mean, it's past tense, right? It all happened a really long time ago. And as an English teacher I am very much into verb tenses and correct grammar. But the magic of Christmas is that it is not past tense. It is present tense and it continues.

The first reading talks about the little town of Bethlehem that seemed too small and insignificant to make any difference for anything, but is remembered and revered (and sung about in Christmas carols) to this day as the birthplace of the savior whose "greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace." In the Gospel, when the pregnant Mary visits the pregnant Elizabeth, Elizabeth's baby (who will be John the Baptist) recognizes the Lord who will be born this week. The baby leaps for joy in his mother's womb. John will be the voice in the wilderness preparing the way for the Lord. And we spend Advent making our spiritual and secular preparations. This week is Christmas. In present tense we celebrate his birth. We should leap for joy today in anticipation of the birth that will save us. The Lord is come. This week the Lord is born, and he continues to live in our lives and in our hearts.

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