

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA
Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A, December 18, 2016
The Rev. Bill Queen
“More than a Christmas Pageant”

- at the 10:30 service this morning the children and teens of the parish will be presenting the traditional Christmas pageant; unless you have something better to do at that time (it is hard for me to imagine anything better than a Christmas pageant!) I invite you to stay or to come back for it

- I'd also like to point out that the pageant is more than just a reenactment of the events surrounding Jesus' birth; it is more than just a reenactment in the same way that Holy Communion is more than just a reenactment of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples, and in the way that Holy Baptism is more than just a reenactment of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River

- while I would not assert that the Christmas pageant is a sacrament, it does work upon us in a similar way as those sacraments do, in allowing us to participate in part of Jesus' life experience; I'd say that watching the Christmas pageant touches us, like a sacrament, with some of God's grace; and it certainly touches the children and teens who act out those roles of prophet and Gabriel, Joseph and Mary, Wise Men, shepherds, and angels (even if they are not necessarily aware of it at the time) as they put on the traditional costumes, walk to their places, and read their lines; the congregation's presence here in the church as they perform the Christmas pageant is a witness to them; it is a witness to them that these events are more than play acting; that they are important events; that they are events that continue to have importance for people's lives, all around the world; that it is these events, and all of the wonderful consequences from them, that represent the true meaning of Christmas for all of God's children, no matter how young or how old

- and speaking of the consequences that follow from the events of Christmas; this year's pageant will have something in it you may not have ever heard before in a Christmas pageant; it will end with me reading a “Summary of Jesus' Life”; I can't take any credit for writing this, as it is something that has been handed down from church to church; but it is not something we are used to hearing at this time of year, for normally at Christmas time we only hear the story up through the arrival and departure of the Wise Men; so listen now to this summary of Jesus' entire life; because without remembering all the rest that happened to him, and all that he did for us, the story of the tiny baby in a manger is, at best, incomplete; the story of the tiny baby in a manger is, at worst, misleading

“Summary of Jesus’ Life”

Jesus was born in an obscure village, the child of peasant parents. He worked as a carpenter until he was thirty, when he was called by God to become an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never started a family. He never traveled more than 200 miles from the place where he was born. He never did any of those things that accompany people's idea of greatness. He had no credentials but himself. While still early in his ministry, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. Some of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies. He suffered through the mockery of a trial, and though innocent, was convicted. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth—his coat. When he was dead, he was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave, but would soon rise again.

But on that night of his birth so long ago, it was no ordinary child who cried in his mother's arms. This boy would teach his elders and the entire world the ways of God. This boy would heal the sick and raise the dead. This boy would preach the coming of the Kingdom of God. This boy would die on the cross, and give his life for the sins of the world, and bring us back to God.

This little child is the one whose coming we await again, whose birth long ago brought with it the promise of God's never-failing love for us. This is the child who seeks a home in our hearts and in the hearts of all humankind. This is the child whose love conquers every ill. This is the child who brings peace and new life to all those who believe in his name. This child is Emmanuel, God with us, the very presence of the Lord of life. He has come down to earth that we might know his love, first proclaimed by the crying of a babe in his mother's arms, under the shelter of a stable, on a dark and silent night.