

Christ Church

Produced by the congregation of Christ Church Episcopal in Sheridan, MT

December 13, 2023

What Do We Know About Christmas

Rev. Janis Hansen



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We don't know the actual date or year. The date of 25 December was adopted by Christians in Rome in the mid-300's, partly to move the Roman winter solstice festival to a Christian context.

Commercialization of Christmas began in earnest in the 19th century. The first commercial production of Christmas cards was in 1873. Gift giving began in the mid 19th century, and now accounts for a huge revenue for many businesses.

Christmas has "emotional power." It evokes deep feelings, along with our memories from the past — some joyous, some painful.

The stories of Christmas are not meant to be historical and factual. How do we know that? The stories are very different in the Gospels, and the length varies greatly. In Matthew, the tone is different from the other Gospels.

The stories speak to our human condition; with themes of oppression and liberation, darkness and light, and exile and return, echoing the exodus from Egypt.

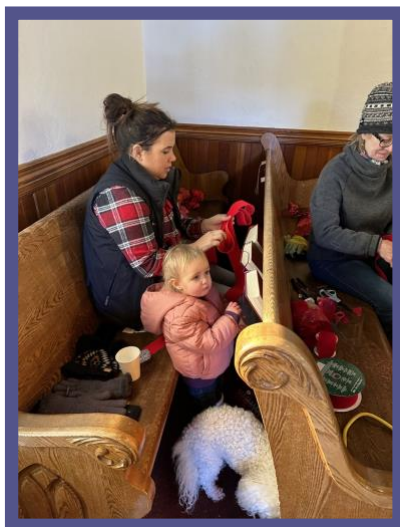
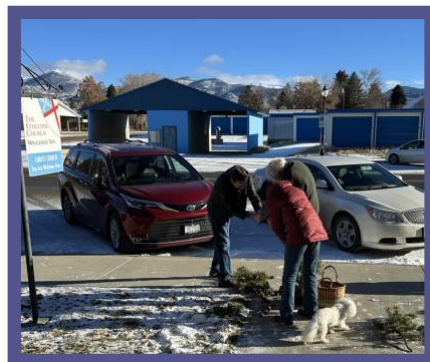
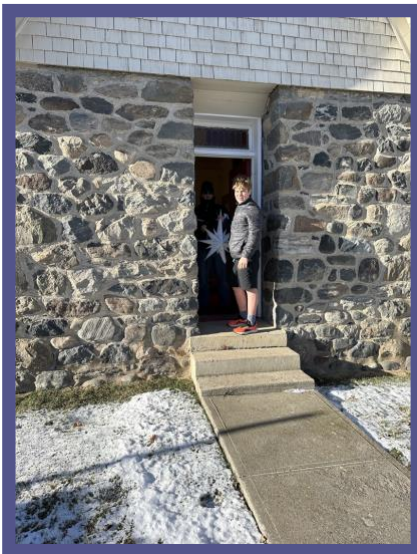
The stories contrast the peace of God, vs. the violence of the domination system of Rome. The stories challenge the Roman, and all domination systems that seek to suppress others. Luke portrays Jesus birth as heralding the lifting up of "the lowly."

Stories like these can be co-opted by cultures, as in the commercialization in our time. We are called to know these stories in their historical and truth-telling context, and to imagine a world where bondage and darkness are to be overcome.

*adapted from Marcus Borg's presentation at Trinity Cathedral, Portland 12/2013

Greening of the Church

Sandra Baril



The hanging of the greens, or the greening of the church, is the act of decorating the church in the spirit of Advent and Christmas. It is not only one of the oldest Christmas traditions, but actually predates the Christian holiday of Christmas. Using greens around the winter solstice can be found across many cultures around the world.

Early records share that King's Chapel in Boston, Massachusetts began decorating with greenery as early as the 1690s. So for hundreds of years, the church has led the way with the remembrance of Christ's incarnation through the evergreens in the church during the Advent season. At this time we prepare for the one who has come, whom we expect to come, who has come into our lives in numerous ways in various times and places, and the one who will come again.

The Man and the Birds

Author Unknown as told by Paul Harvey

The man I'm going to tell you about was not a scrooge, he was a kind decent, mostly good man. Generous to his family and upright in his dealings with other men. But he just didn't believe in all of that incarnation stuff that the churches proclaim at Christmas time. It just didn't make sense and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just couldn't swallow the Jesus story, about God coming to Earth as a man.

He told his wife I'm truly sorry to distress you, but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve. He said he would feel like a hypocrite and that he would much rather just stay at home, but that he would wait up for them. So he stayed and they went to the midnight service.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier and then he went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper.

Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound. Then another ... and then another. At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against the living room window. But when he went to the front door to investigate he found a flock of birds huddled outside miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in the storm and in a desperate search for shelter they had tried to fly through his large landscape window. That is what had been making the sound.

Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures just lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter. All he would have to do is to direct the birds into the shelter.

Quickly, he put on a coat and galoshes and he tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light so the birds would know the way in. But the birds did not come in.

So, he figured that food would entice them. He hurried back to the house and fetched some bread crumbs. He sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail of bread crumbs to the yellow-lighted wide open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the bread crumbs.

The birds continued to flap around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them but could not. He tried shooing them into the barn by walking around and waving his arms. Instead, they scattered in every direction ... every direction except into the warm lighted barn.

And that's when he realized they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me. That I am not trying to hurt them, but to help them. But how? Any move he made tended to frighten them and confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him.

He thought to himself, if only I could be a bird and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to the safe warm ... to the safe warm barn. But I would have to be one of them so they could see ... and hear ... and understand.

At that moment the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. He stood there listening to the bells, *Adeste Fidelis*, listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas.

And he sank to his knees in the snow ...



Christ Church Episcopal

304 South Main Street
P.O. Box 152
Sheridan, MT 59749

Telephone
406 842 7713
www.rvec.com
Bible Study
Sundays 9am
Services
Sundays 10am

Janis Hansen, Rector
ubicari@msn.com
home: 406-842-7715
cell: 503-780-5767

Robert Brown, Senior Warden
Misterbrown@3rivers.net
cell: 406-660-7142

INVITE people into our midst
INCLUDE people in the life of the church
INFORM people about past events that shape our present,
and current events that shape our future
PROCLAIM the gospel in thought, word and deed
REJOICE in a new life found in Christ Jesus.

Mission Statement

To be formed as the body of Christ, seeking to love and serve one another and those in need.

Vision Statement

To be Christ's continued presence in the Ruby Valley by welcoming those who seek Christ, offering varied forms of services, reflecting our diversity while maintaining our Episcopal identity.

Service Leaders for December/January

Upcoming Service Leaders for December/January

17 Dec: Liturgy of the Word– Dorothy DeHart
24 Dec: Eucharist – Rev. Janis Hansen
31 Dec: Morning Prayer– Sandra Baril
7 Jan: Eucharist – Rev. Janis Hansen
14 Jan: Eucharist – Rev. Janis Hansen

Upcoming Lectors for December/January

17 Dec: Caleb Harbor
24 Dec: Dorothy DeHart
31 Dec: Alice Forwood
7 Jan: Robert Brown
14 Jan: Sandra Baril

