

O God be in my mouth as I speak for you and fill this place with your great grace, that we may leave this place less of what used to be and more of what we ought to be, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

In the Fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis and Lysanias ruler of Abilene during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

This past summer, I had one of those great opportunities as a parent to feel really old.

How many of you this past summer saw the new Star Trek movie? Most of you probably remember the old series from the sixties and the various movie and other series incarnations in the 1980's and 1990's.

However, Paramount decided a few years ago that the time was right for a remake of the old classic series or a new take on how all those old 1960's characters, Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, and Dr. McCoy first met.

Being a good Episcopalian, I was of course, skeptical. How could a "new Movie" possibly be better than the old prayer book...oops I mean old series.

Anyway I was pleasantly surprised to discover that I actually liked the new movie. Furthermore, my daughters thought it was great.

They loved the story, the action, and the fact that the "new/old characters" were played by young attractive actors didn't hurt much either.

Having gotten excited about the new movie, I thought they would like to see some of the old classic stories that I grew up with (this is the part where I get to feel old), I dusted off the 1982 movie, Start Trek II: the wrath of Khan.

It has always been one of my favorite movies, plenty of humor, action, and I thought it would give my kids a chance to get to know the old characters better.

My daughters popped the movie into the DVD and about 20 minutes later they bailed out, telling me that they thought it was the most boring movie they had ever seen.

AHHH, the pain of parenthood and being told that what you once loved is dull, or just not the “same” as the “new” exciting product on the big screen.

By now though, you are probably wondering what Star Trek has to do with the passage I read from St. Luke’s gospel at the beginning of my sermon.

Actually whenever I hear this selection on the second Sunday of Advent, I always think about Star Trek.

At this point, you probably think your rector is completely off his rocker.

Well this being the Advent/Christmas season, I may well be on my way to the looney bin, but the reason this lesson reminds me of Star Trek has to do with the mention of the name Tiberius.

In the Fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius.....

Does that help? Well all right after hearing the following explanation you will probably all agree this is the silliest word association test you ever heard.

If you remember the old television series, William Shatner always introduced himself to aliens in the following way, “This is Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise.”

Does that ring any bells? Ever wonder what the T stood for? Yes you guessed it Tiberius.

This is why reading this passage always reminds me of Star Trek. Okay, I probably have now officially gotten the nerd of the year award from the parish.

But you'll have to admit that the name Tiberius does not get a lot of use these days, so when you hear it, it does tend to stick in your mind.

But back to Luke's gospel, it is obvious that our author believes that time and historic setting are important.

This is why Luke lists everyone that is in charge of his world from Tiberius to Caiaphas before he lets John the Baptist put in an appearance.

Why do you suppose Luke cares about all those dusty old historic leaders?

This is an important question to answer particularly when you compare another gospel like John's to Luke's, because there is no such emphasis on historic setting.

For John (which is usually read on the Christmas eve), in the beginning was the word, the Logos in the Greek, the creative redeeming power of God's mighty spirit.

The word was always here, always present from the time of the Exodus in Egypt to the time of King David right down to the birth of Christ, there was never a time when the Word, the Logos did not exist.

As it proclaims in Genesis, God said let there be light and there was.

For John, Jesus' life was not so much a historic event but a reminder that God's creative word has always been continually shaping and molding the history of God's people and our world.

This tension between the cosmic and the historic setting of the gospels has always been present in the Christian Church.

Some Christians have preferred to think of God's incarnation in the world as an ever continuing event, something that is continually happening, breaking into our reality.

Other people focus on the historic moment that God chose to act in human history.

You can think about the difference in these view points in the following way.

I have not yet visited the holy land, but I have a suspicion that there is something truly wondrous about being able to walk the same paths that Jesus and Paul once did.

To look around and see where all the stories from Holy Scripture actually happened must be inspiring.

At the same time, we should remember that God's redemptive power is still happening in our lives and cannot be confined to one particular place like the middle east or time like the reign of Tiberius.

In fact, I believe a vital incarnate Christian faith needs the perspective of both Luke and John.

At the same time, we need to be careful that our emphasis on history does not become a quaint form of nostalgia.

There has always been a certain human tendency to never be comfortable in our own time, to find ourselves longing for something that is no longer here or never really was.

The old television show Happy Days made many people long for the simplicity of the 1950's but we must remember that this was also a time of segregation and fear, as many of us wondered if we would survive the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

So how do we avoid being trapped by the past? The Advent season gives us an excellent answer to this question, because it holds these two perspectives in tension: Christ's historic birth in Bethlehem and Christ's eventual cosmic return to judge our world.

Advent reminds the church that a historic event in the past has changed and continues to change our lives and our St. Martin's community.

The power of this history should never be underestimated.

Tomorrow we will observe the 58th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. For many in a previous generation this was a life-changing event. They remember where they were, what they were doing, the exact moment when they heard the news.

The Pearl Harbor bombing shaped an entire generation's experience and gave focus to a nation that went to war to preserve our freedom and the freedom of others in our world.

Much like our Lord's birth, an event like Pearl Harbor does not remain a static event.

It continues to shape who we are and how we understand our common human experience.

And more importantly how we are called to act in our world now, at this incarnational moment.

Each of us, despite our many flaws and failings, has a part to play in this story. God challenges us to put aside the past and to tell others how God's word and love is changing our lives today and the life of our church community.

By Christ's incarnation, the past, present, and future have been wedded together and in Advent we are reminded that God needs us to ensure that God's word is heard and more importantly incarnated, that we incarnate that word, that holy logos to a world that longs for redemption.

I have always thought that T. S. Eliot captured this incarnational vision in the following way:

Love is most nearly itself when here and now cease to matter. Old men ought to be explorers, here and there does not matter, We must be still and still moving, into further intensity. For further union, a deeper communion, through the dark cold and empty desolation, The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters, of the Petrel and the propoise. In my end is my beginning.