

## **“The Obvious Question of Christmas: So What’s Next”**

A Sermon Shared with the Congregation of St. Andrew’s United Church  
For Christmas Eve, December 24, 2015 at 9:00 p.m.

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 2:1-14

(by The Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman)

The night has arrived, the day of Christmas is almost here. For many of us, this represents the end of the journey of a long time of preparation and anticipation.

We have reached the object of the season, and yet it is the beginning of a time of transformation, not the end. So what’s next?

For me that is the important question of this Christmas Eve. It is not worrying about how the dinner will be served tomorrow of the next day, or getting the final presents wrapped before morning, though I share with some of you those immediate and real concerns. It is not worrying about the condition of the roads as we travel, or the health and well-being of loved ones we hope to see this season, as important as that is if you, like me, have travel plans over the next week or so.

No, the question is: “So what’s next?”

The birth of Jesus is the culmination of anticipation and expectation, a long journey of waiting and wondering, but the birth is not the end of a process, but the beginning of a new era.

Think about your experiences in life. Is it not appropriate to suggest that we only look to “what’s next?” when we feel we have accomplished and finished what we sought out to do previously? At least in a healthy transition stage of life, that is true.

We may say with exasperation “What’s next?” when we feel life has treated us badly, or we have been frustrated in many attempts to accomplish what we set out to do.

Some years ago the CBC taped a Christmas concert in a school in Quebec for a special Country Canada program. Many things went wrong in the taping. The donkey carrying Mary refused to budge for Joseph. When the two of them finally gave up trying and left the animal behind so that they could walk to the inn door, on foot, the animal wailed and screeched to cover up Mary’s own desperate plea to find a place to stay in which she could have her baby.

Once they got to the manger scene, the baby that was to be placed in the straw-filled cradle was nowhere to be found. As the choir sang with passion and with holy awe “Away in a Manger,” the baby Jesus was simply away.

The unfortunate part of the whole situation was seeing the faces on the children who had rehearsed so long and so carefully for their big stage moment. They did not know what to do as everything seemingly crashed around them.

I could not help but think that most of us face Christmas like these children. We know how to handle Christmas when things go well, and a baby, meek and milk, lies still in a manger filled with straw. But what do we do when the baby is not there, or the baby grows up, or the future is uncertain, or Christmas is behind us? How does the Christmas story speak to us then?

Yet if we ask in a healthy way “So what is next?” we are reflecting an inner peace and confidence that we are ready to face the future with new verve, and new opportunity.

We are ready to face that future, and be prepared to know that life indeed does go on after Christmas, and we need not be discouraged.

If only we had the wisdom of a six-year-old boy who was being yelled at for something he knew he did not do. He was shocked at the strong words that his father used, but more concerned was he about the feelings of his younger sister who heard the tirade addressed his way, so he remarked in a hushed voice: “Don’t worry, Lisa. Daddy’s under a lot of pressure these days.”

Whatever we may be facing in this transition through Christmas and eventually into a new year, do not be afraid, said the angel chorus.

May we hear that message anew this night, and may we be thankful for God’s presence to help us face all that comes our way.