

## AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

12/25/18 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Christmas Day (II): Isaiah 62:6-12, Psalm 97; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:1-20

Okay...it's Christmas so I'm going to ask you to do something a little bit different. [stomp-stomp-clap; stomp-stomp-clap] Come on, join in [stomp-stomp-clap; stomp-stomp-clap]. It's Christmas, so show some generosity of Spirit and help me out a little [stomp-stomp-clap; stomp-stomp-clap]. Okay...thank you; you can stop.

As many of you know, what we just did was the lead-in for the song, "We will rock you" by an 80's rock band called Queen. By the way, if you think this is the first time something like this has been done in a church, you'd be wrong; that song was actually recorded in an old church, to take advantage of the acoustics!

The technique of getting you all to stomp and clap in unison, as we all know, is called "audience participation". In the case with the band Queen, this was a very intentional technique. It didn't just happen that the band played a song and the audience starting clapping along. Rather the band intentionally created a song that would involve the audience in a very specific manner for a very specific reason. The technique was meant to blur the lines between band and audience; it was meant to make the audience feel a part of the band.

Some of you may have seen the recent movie out about this band. It's called *Bohemian Rhapsody*, and it's filled with themes of redemption, reconciliation and forgiveness. In fact, Richard and I are planning to use it for our Lenten film series for those very reasons. But I mention the film today, because of the other foundational message of the movie, is that we all belong; we are all family.

The band members in Queen often reminded each other of this—that they were family. There were bits about the importance and challenges of biological families as well, but more emphasis was placed on chosen families. Which is why the band wanted to blur the lines between band and audience. They didn't want the audience to simply enjoy the music; they wanted the audience to feel a part of the music, so that in participating they experience that they, too, were a part of this huge, extended family.

That's what the incarnation of God is all about. God sent God's self into the physical form of Jesus so that we might participate in salvation history. Now the world was waiting for a strong and mighty, warrior-like Messiah who would swoop in and save God's chosen. But God knows the power of audience participation, so God sent our Messiah in the form of a poor and vulnerable baby. And just think of all the audience participation built into that.

If Jesus had been born into a wealthy family, the birth would've probably been handled discreetly by a select few well-trained people and announced later at an appropriate time. Instead, God sent Jesus into a setting where, person after person, animal after animal, became a part of the action. The different inn-keepers where Mary and Joseph stopped for lodging, the people at the manger site who must have provided help, the sheep and donkeys who looked on, the shepherds who came to visit, the magi who later made the journey, and finally us, who gather today to re-visit the glorious story.

There was foreshadowing of us all becoming family back in that passage we read in Isaiah. The prophet proclaimed: "They shall be called, 'The Holy People'." Which, of course, means we are no longer just people, we are God's chosen family. All of us. None of us are too odd, too sinful, too obnoxious, too irritating, or too full of doubt not to be included. God chose us.

In the movie I mentioned, the bandmembers take turns pointing out the ways each of the other members are misfits. One was supposed to have been a dentist, one an engineer, and

one is a man who likes wearing outlandish women's clothing and has teeth that are too big for his mouth. And yet, they are family—a family of misfits; everybody has a place.

And isn't that our story of becoming God's family? Even Mary and Joseph themselves were misfits. We can't be sure of the actual facts, but there was definitely controversy around the pregnancy and the marriage. They must have been ostracized in their local communities. And, yet, they are the Holy family.

In our reading from Titus this morning, it's described this way: "When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to God's [his] mercy." God chooses us not because of our perfection or righteousness, but according to God's mercy.

Of course, it doesn't stop there. God always moves on to the audience participation part, so it says in Titus: "This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." ...So that we might become heirs, or one might say, "participants" or even, family members.

We come together today, then, to celebrate our wonderful, huge family of misfits—God's chosen family here on earth. We come to hold up the baby Jesus to the world in declaration that love does win—not perfection, not egoism, not intimidation, but love...God's love.

And we celebrate with audience participation, as we raise our voice in song, as we recount God's salvation history in the form of the Eucharist, and as we join together in prayer. This is how God engages us. And then we take that energy—because this is the other thing the band Queen understood—that once you build up the energy, the people are poised to do something...to further commit themselves to the message being presented. So we take the energy we find in this liturgy, and we share that excitement, that knowledge, that inspiration out in the world.

We share with others the Good News of Christ, which is that we all belong; that we are all God's beloved, and that God so loved the world, God sent God's self in the form of Jesus to live among us! I love how it's announced in the Gospel this morning: "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people."

From now on, when you hear those sounds [stomp-stomp-clap; stomp-stomp-clap], I hope you remember what that call to audience participation means to us as Christians. Or I hope that you'll recreate it in your head when you need the reminder that we—the misfits of the entire world—are family. "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors", and God favors us all!

-AMEN

### **Isaiah 62:6-12**

Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted sentinels; all day and all night they shall never be silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it renowned throughout the earth. The LORD has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies, and foreigners shall not drink the wine for which you have labored; but those who garner it shall eat it and praise the LORD, and those who gather it shall drink it in my holy courts.

Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an ensign over the peoples. The LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to daughter Zion, "See, your salvation comes; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him." They shall be called, "The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD"; and you shall be called, "Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken."

### **Psalms 97**

- 1 The LORD is King; let the earth rejoice; \*  
let the multitude of the isles be glad.
- 2 Clouds and darkness are round about him, \*  
righteousness and justice are the foundations of his throne.
- 3 A fire goes before him \*  
and burns up his enemies on every side.
- 4 His lightnings light up the world; \*  
the earth sees it and is afraid.
- 5 The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD, \*  
at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.
- 6 The heavens declare his righteousness, \*  
and all the peoples see his glory.
- 7 Confounded be all who worship carved images  
and delight in false gods! \*  
Bow down before him, all you gods.
- 8 Zion hears and is glad, and the cities of Judah rejoice, \*  
because of your judgments, O LORD.
- 9 For you are the LORD,  
most high over all the earth; \*  
you are exalted far above all gods.
- 10 The LORD loves those who hate evil;  
he preserves the lives of his saints  
and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.
- 11 Light has sprung up for the righteous, \*  
and joyful gladness for those who are truehearted.
- 12 Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous, \*  
and give thanks to his holy Name.

### **Titus 3:4-7**

When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

### **Luke 2:(1-7) 8-20**

~~[In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.]~~

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.