

Advent 4, Year A  
Dec. 22, 2019  
Saint James, Wheat Ridge,

By the Rev. Becky Jones

The dreadfulness of the situation  
was just starting to sink in for the Pevensie children.  
They'd discovered that Lucy's friend Tumnus had been arrested,  
His home ransacked by the white witch's police.  
They are quite shaken by the news.  
What should they do?  
What COULD they do in these circumstances?  
The temptation to abandon Tumnus to his fate,  
And quietly go back home is great.  
They're wracked by indecision.

And that's when Lucy saw it.  
It was a beautiful robin.  
And the robin seemed like it was trying to get their attention.

As the children approach the bird, it flits farther away,  
Then stares at them.  
They come closer.  
Again the bird flies on to a farther tree,  
Then stares intently at them.  
"You know," says Lucy,  
"I really believe he means us to follow him."

And so, going from tree to tree,  
Always a few yards ahead of the Pevensie children,  
The robin led them onward  
For about half an hour.  
The robin led them a long way from where they started.

At one point, a dispute broke out,  
When Edmund questioned whether the robin could be trusted.  
Maybe it was leading them into a trap, he said.  
But the others thought not.  
Robins, they decided, are good birds

And wouldn't engage in untrustworthy behavior.

And so the wonderful story told by C.S. Lewis  
 In "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" advances  
 Because the children placed their trust  
 In a winged messenger.

We all know that Advent is a season of angels.  
 Gabriel appears to Mary, then to Joseph, and to Zechariah;  
 And a heavenly host appears to the shepherds on Christmas night.  
 But there are no angels in Narnia.

There are unicorns, and fauns, and centaurs,  
 Talking animals of all kinds,  
 But no angels.  
 C.S. Lewis avoids overtly Biblical figures or imagery in his Narnia books.

But that robin seems to me  
 To be very much like an angel.

Angels have many ways of serving god, according to Scripture,  
 And carrying messages to human beings is an important one.  
 In both Hebrew and Greek, the root of the word angel  
 Is the same as the root for the word messenger.  
 Angels ARE messengers.  
 And the robin is a winged messenger in the service of Aslan,  
 Guiding the children to safety and help,  
 And also calling them to follow Aslan,  
 Even though they don't yet even know his name.

They agree to follow this little messenger,  
 Even though they can't know what lies ahead.  
 They put themselves in the robin's care,  
 Because they want to see where he will lead them.

In this morning's gospel lesson,  
 Joseph, too, is wracked by indecision.  
 He's just learned his fiancé, Mary, is pregnant,  
 And he knows the baby isn't his.

He's trying to figure out what to do,  
And none of the options look good.  
If he publicly accuses her,  
He knows that the law calls for her to be stoned to death!  
And Joseph is a righteous man.  
He has always followed the law.

But stoning seems so harsh, and she's so young.  
So he's going to just handle this quietly.  
Put her away somewhere.

But then, in a dream, he encounters an angel of the Lord,  
Who tells him what to do.  
"Take Mary as your wife," the angel says.  
"And when her son is born, name him Jesus.  
This isn't going to be just any child, you know.  
This boy is going to be the savior of his people."

When Joseph wakes up, he knows what to do.  
He does just what the angel said to do.  
He can't know where he's being led,  
But he believes in the goodness and the love  
Of the angel who is leading him,  
The angel who is the messenger  
Of a good and loving god.

Today, I know many of us are afraid or discouraged.  
Many of us are wrestling with serious challenges.  
If we make the wrong move, it could be very bad.  
We want to do what's right,  
But what if our actions hurt someone else,  
Someone who doesn't deserve to be hurt?

Whenever we're worried or anxious,  
We might ponder with Joseph  
The meaning of the name of Jesus,  
"he will save."

We are promised that God is with us,  
Helping us every step of the way,

Just as God helped Joseph.

That's why the name "Emmanuel" frames the entire Gospel of Matthew.  
 It begins with a baby who is "God with us,"  
 And ends with that child, grown,  
 Promising that he will be with us always.  
 In many ways, the whole purpose of Matthew's gospel  
 Is to show how Jesus is "Emmanuel,"  
 God with us,  
 And how Jesus will be Emmanuel for the rest of human history.

Do we pay attention to the messengers God sends us?  
 Just as Joseph depended on the law of Moses  
 to guide him most of the time,  
 if he'd followed the law in this case,  
 Mary would have died, and Jesus would never have been born.

Likewise, we all have laws and rules that guide our behavior  
 Most of the time.  
 But those laws can't cover every situation,  
 And sometimes we feel we're called  
 To break the rules,  
 To ignore the law,  
 In order to achieve a greater good.  
 But it's often hard to know when to do this.

But we can trust God to send a messenger.  
 These messengers may not be as dramatic  
 As Joseph's night-time visitor.  
 In fact, as our Old Testament reading teaches,  
 Sometimes we may actively resist  
 A clear message that God offers us.  
 God will send it anyway.  
 We will know the messenger's arrival  
 When we hear the words, "Do not be afraid."

These words may be from a friend or from a stranger,  
 A moving encounter with beauty  
 Or a subtle of deep change of heart.  
 It may be a feeling of courage or newfound purpose

Washing over us.  
When we hear that message,  
We hear Christ inviting us  
To serve his mission in some new way.

Joseph trusted the angel without hesitation.  
This certainty came from a lifetime spent  
Applying God's word to daily life.  
Joseph had studied and knew well the words of sacred scripture.  
If, like Joseph, we have listened for God's voice  
In the expected places, like scripture,  
We too will be ready to trust  
An unexpected messenger from God.

This is part of the Advent message of hope:  
Beyond merely announcing the birth we celebrate this week,  
Our lessons today give us a model  
For encountering Christ and serving his mission  
Throughout the year.  
When God's messengers arrive,  
If we trust their word,  
We can find in it  
The enlightenment of a new life in Christ.