

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Sunday, December 22, 2019
Fourth Sunday in Advent

“Ready or Not...Here I Come!”
Fourth of Four in “Are You Ready?”

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

Christian Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25



Welcome to the *fourth* and last of four sermons dedicated to Advent entitled “Are You Ready?”



This morning, I am not going to preach a sermon. Instead I will only introduce in a homily a hymn with which I chose to kick-off our Christmas carol sing. I chose NCH hymn #105 “Gentle Joseph, Joseph Dear”.



I chose this hymn because it does not *other-ize* the Christmas story. What do I mean by *other-ize*? Well, notice how in the first verse we hear *Mary's own* voice speaking to her partner Joseph. In the second verse, we hear *Joseph's own* voice speaking to his partner *Mary*. And folks, their words to one another are personal! Yes, the hymn is about the Christ-child, Emmanuel, being born. But they have put themselves in the story. The story is also about them!



Mary says to Joseph, “God will surely your goodness hear, as you will love this newborn child”. Joseph replies to her, “Gladly Mary, Mary mine, I will cradle the child divine”. You see, in the hymn, Mary and Joseph did not displace or distance themselves from the miracle happening. They were part of their own and God’s story.

Friends, I would like to you to turn your neighbour and gently advise “Don’t’ *other-ize* your story”.¹ In other words, as you celebrate this Advent and Christmas season, I don’t want you *otherize* your nativity story.



This year, I don’t want the story to only be about sheep, angels, wise men, Mary, and shepherd. I want the story to be about *you*. How are you in the story? What is Dart, Marion, Wayne, Bonnie, Eric, Peter, Bill, Matthew, Holly, and Becky doing in this story? This year make sure you are included in this story.

How is this done? Well, first, ask yourself what congruencies exist between you and the characters in the nativity story? For example, you know Mary and Joseph weren’t married. They were betrothed. And it seems to me they co-habitated.

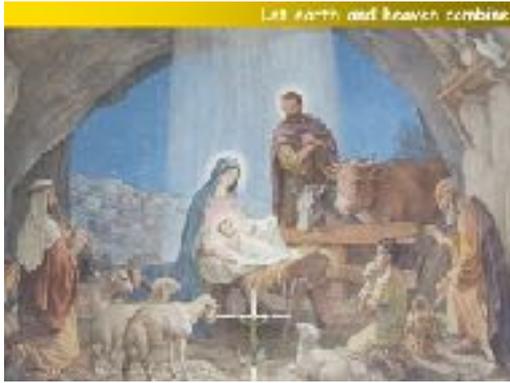
¹ Normal usage of the term ‘other-ize’ pertains to xenophobia. I am using the term in a more benign manner. Instead of using the term in discriminatory sense, I use the term in the message to describe a process of writing oneself out of a narrative or distancing oneself from an event or message. In other words, in this message otheriz-ing means to see the story, message, or meaning of an event, story, or plot as irrelevant to oneself. That is ‘detatching’ oneself from the story being heard.



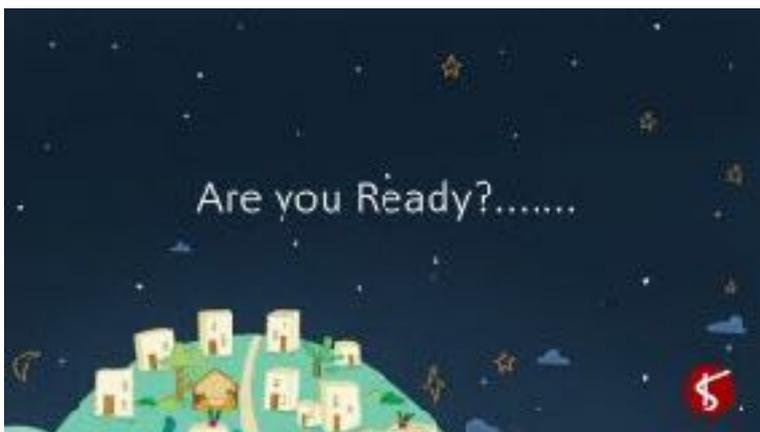
The first family was a blended family. I come from a blended family, and this Christmas I will be in the midst of a blended family. How will I love my partner, and all the children in my care this Christmas? Who will I be in the Christian story? How will I create opportunities for those in my company to see “heaven and earth to combine”?



You can do it with a prayer while friends and relatives are at the dinner table. You can do it with a note of affirmation in a Christmas card. You can make heaven and Earth combine by reconciling with someone that has for whatever reason been lost to you. What I advise to you this morning is ‘Don’t *otherize*’ this story’. You are in it!



So, get ready. Put yourself in the story. You don't have much time. As the hymn states, "Soon will God [...] be born in Bethlehem". God is in this story. God certainly has not *otherized* it. It is as if God is saying, "Ready or not...here I come!"



This was the Word of God, and it was preached to the people of God and the people of God responded, "Amen".