

Three Jesuses – based on 2 Samuel 7:1-11,16 and Luke 1:46b-55
Aspen Community UMC
December 21, 2008 – Fourth Sunday in Advent

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*(The story of the birth of Jesus reminds us of the ways we know him.
The first way we know him is through stable and story, or the historical Jesus.
The second is the Jesus we know through theology and the church.
The third is the Jesus we know through direct experience of the presence of God,
or what many call the Christ consciousness. These are all part of our Christian experience.)*

Those two readings tell us something about the culture into which Jesus was born.
They help us know the expectations these ancient peoples had for a messiah.

The passage from Luke is one of the most revolutionary statements in the Bible.

We know it as the Magnificat – or Mary's song.

Did you know that during the 1980's public reading of the Magnificat -
was banned in Guatemala -
because the dictatorship believed it to be too revolutionary?

We have heard it over and over in song – but we often skip over the words.

Our mothers would not have approved -
nor would our government - or church - or most law-abiding persons.
Were someone to sing this who was from another country or political group -
not in good relations with our country -
we would call the writer a potential terrorist – would we not?

But it communicates to us the urgent need for something to happen -
someone to make a difference.

The world of the Israelites was in need of the messiah –
let's say much of the Mediterranean world -
to carry on what they remembered of that King David.

Actually the words of Mary recon back to a foremother of hers – Hannah.

Hannah spoke similar words.

They were about a promise given to Abraham and Sarah -
that they would be a blessing to nations.

So the words given Mary by the writer of Luke's gospel
connect Mary with those who came before her in the history of her people.
This is a piece of history – or perhaps legend - that will cradle the person of Jesus.

The reading in 2nd Samuel – gives us a picture of what people expected of God.

It does not tell us about God – but what people expected God to be like.

The reading from 2nd Samuel is really amusing.

I think it is a commentary about this great new house David has built for himself.

It is kind of a dressing down about it

while at the same time affirming David's leadership and future for Israel.

He will be a great king.

What would it sound like in a contemporary setting?

"I have made you everything you are. You now live in this fine house -
and I - let me remind you - still hang out in a tent."

Is that not what it is saying?

"You will do well, and you will be a great king,
and I will continue to follow you around in my tent."

And David – we might note also – does not consider living in a tent himself –
he chooses a fine house. The God he knew – lead a simple life.

Interesting when we think about where Jesus was born.

Then David wants to build a house for the Lord – but the Lord would prefer the tent.

David must have thought God was something to be housed somewhere
tended to – but perhaps not let too close –

certainly a more distant God than Jesus will share with us years later.

That is why I like that reading from 2nd Samuel.

Now that we have a little background for the birth of Jesus,

I want to talk about ways we know him – ways we know Jesus.

That is why I call this message "Three Jesuses."



The first is the Jesus of stable and story.

The Jesus of stable and story is the Jesus
born in that stable in that setting of Bethlehem to parents Mary and Joseph.

The Jesus of stable and story includes the stories so old
that its hard to sort out legend from myth from fragments of lived history.

The Jesus of stable and story is also the historical Jesus Albert Schweitzer began studying
in the late 1800's - and since by the research of the scholars of the Jesus Seminar -
and even more recent in the study of early Christian origins, archeology, and even genealogy.

So, there are stories that precede him and tell us about his world.

And – there are the gospels that tell us about him and what he did and said.

The Jesus of stable and story teaches us to love one another, to care about those in need,
to treat others as if they are divine – for the divine is present.

The Jesus of stable and story taught us the Lord's Prayer.

This Jesus was a threat to Rome and to the synagogue.

He was willing to confront injustice, and call for integrity in religion and relationships.

This Jesus chose followers in the disciples, and sent them out to do the work
of what he called building the kingdom of God.

This is the Jesus we decide to follow.

This Jesus still has us thinking about the kingdom of God for our time.

As children we may have assumed that Jesus was Anglo, like most of us.

But, we have since learned that he was Middle Eastern - never spoke a word of English in his life
and he never even dreamed of a Christian church.

And we have learned that the story of his life has similarities with the life story of the Buddha.

His story has parallels in the life of Confucius.

The birth story of the Egyptian god Horus has similarities.

He was also born to a virgin mother and his birth heralded by an angel.¹

The Jesus of stable and story has inspired all sorts of good in the world by many people.

He has inspired us to care about justice, stewardship,

freedom for people who are oppressed,

and to care about building peace.

He continues to inspire us in our learning and discovering how to be a follower today.

So, there is a little about the Jesus of stable and story.



The second Jesus is the Jesus of the church, theology, and Christ.

The second Jesus is the one defined by the councils of the early Roman church. The title Christ came from those who began to try and make sense of what had happened – with the man and his life and his death – and what had been observed as his resurrection.

It was the theologians who wanted to define Jesus and in their urgency to build a church – tried to formulate for others what they believed.

This is where we get the creeds that we repeated in churches when we were children, and sometimes now.

This is where we get this idea of the Trinity. They were doing theology. They were trying to figure out the nature of God – and explain it for all time.

Much of the second Jesus makes not enough sense to us now because of the march of history and the study of science and the very real and effective witness of other faith traditions.

Most of us in the progressive Christian traditions no longer see this second Jesus as the one “Son of God” through whom all persons know and find salvation - because we know that term was used for many peoples in ancient times.

So now for many - Christianity becomes a pathway into the mystery of God - and we look for the words to define it for our time.

It is more complicated now because there is no longer one church to decide what we are to believe.

There are many – Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant – and countless denominations within them.

Now how we define this second Jesus – the Jesus of church and theology has often become a personal choice.

That is a little about the second Jesus – the Jesus of the church and theology.



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The third Jesus – the third Jesus
is about the present-ness of God in each of us.
He taught us that we could do what he did and be what he was
we just have never figured out how.
But we do now believe we are all children of God -
and we are guided by how one pastor said -
an inner star –
surely to a greater and greater consciousness.
That is why I am calling the third Jesus – the Christ consciousness.
Remember how Mother Theresa said,
“Every person is Christ for me,
and since there is only one Jesus,
that person is the one person in the world at that moment.”



Each of us probably has a little different take
on the first and second Jesuses.
But as for the third,
you don't need to have accepted any one way of understanding the first two.

But, your first two Jesuses will be what inspires you to a deeper way of living
and a more passionate commitment to the world. They will help you open the door
to the third Jesus – the presence of God in our life in the here and now.



And there is the beautiful connection to Christmas.
Every person can be Christ to you, as you are a Christ to them.
Every person you meet in your life is a possibility – for knowing God.
The Christ consciousness enables us to be aware of this.
The Christ consciousness helps us welcome what comes.
That might be learning and insight and reconciliation
of the things in our lives that confound and confuse us.

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The Christ consciousness takes us to deeper levels of being in this life together.

I imagine the Christ consciousness as a small flame – way deep in my heart.



I hope these thoughts are helpful as you encounter the different Jesuses in your journey.

And I invite you to enjoy the Jesus of stable and story in our Lessons and Carols tonight,
and in our Christmas Eve communion and candle-lighting.

For the Jesus of stable and story – and the Jesus of the church and theology
has been the love of artists and composers throughout all of the history we know since his time.

So, enjoy them this Advent and this Christmas.

I wish you a blessed week.

¹ Adapted from Ian Lawton in "The Birth of the Third Jesus." You may find references to these historical figures in various searches of the internet.