

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Christmas Day: December 25, 2023

The Mood of Christmas

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Merry Christmas and welcome to Christ the Lord Church. I begin speaking to you today with a quote from Howard Thurman.

*“Christmas is a mood, a quality, a symbol. It is never merely a fact. As a fact it is a date on the calendar to the believer it is the anniversary of an event in human history. An individual may relate themselves meaningfully to the fact or the event, but that would not be Christmas.*

*The mood of Christmas – what is it? It is a quickening of the presence of other human beings into whose lives a precious part of one’s own has been released.*

*It is a memory of other days when into one’s path an angel appeared spreading a halo over an ordinary moment or commonplace event. It is an iridescence of sheer delight that bathes one’s whole being with something more wonderful than words can ever tell.*

*Of such is the mood of Christmas.”*

Thank you, Pastor Thurman for the mood of Christmas, very wise words. Last night we read the story of the babe in the manger, his birth being announced by angels to the shepherds. I often wonder how much one thinks of that story as they buy blinking lights and reindeer noses. But even in that, even without a thought of a child being born two thousand years ago, there is a mood of Christmas. This mood is something bigger than us; this mood is actually love, love in its many forms.

Steven Charleston, a Native American Bishop, tells us *“we follow the path of angels or ancestors and medicine people; of elders and teachers and of all those who have sought to align their lives with the dream of life, the hope of life, that peace may come to settle upon us and mercy flow once more to the sleepless seas. We follow the path of knowledge of listening and of prayer. We are seekers of many seasoned healers from an ancient tradition.”*

Again, hope, life and peace as a shared experience of the ages is the description for the mood of Christmas.

Christmas Day as it seems, or rather December 25<sup>th</sup> was probably the least exact time for the actual physical birth of Jesus, also noting the Jewish calendar was a bit different than our current one. But what is it about this day, about this time of the year?

If your mind went quickly to rain, cold, short days and long nights, you would be right. And depending on where you live, you might include snow and ice. But then you might think, ah- but there is Christmas, and your mood might lift. And let's face it, even if you fake the Christmas mood for a few moments, you do get a bit of relief from the world around you. And this is why the birth of Christ is celebrated at this time.

We just had the winter solstice this past Thursday, meaning we experienced the shortest day of the year, which includes the longest night. The longest period of darkness. However, several days later, one will notice the days begin to get longer allowing more light. If Jesus is light in the darkness, what better time of year to celebrate his birth!

Our Gospel proclaims: *"The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God."*

The child in the manger, the Word made flesh, gave us a way to open up our eyes to the truth about God! What is the truth? That even in the smallest, the weakest, the least of us is important to God. Even in times of tears or distress God is there. Even when we expect a mighty savior with a sword and shield, we find it is a meek and mild baby that will actually grow into our salvation.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, *"He comes in the form of the beggar, of the dissolute human child in ragged clothes, asking for help. He confronts you in every person that you meet. As long as there are people, Christ will walk the earth as your neighbor."*

This is the mood of Christmas and it should not end on December 26<sup>th</sup>. Today is only the beginning of the longer days, the single ray of sunshine that will continue to complete the dawn. Today we celebrate Christmas to remind each other, show each other, love each other into finding hope, joy and peace, if even for a moment, because knowing we are children of God guarantees that there will be more of these moments of hope, joy and peace.

For those whose Christmas is Blue, those who have suffered losses, or are grieving - know that the light is growing, and that hope, joy and peace will be waiting when you are ready. Why do you think Hallmark has Christmas in July?

And as Howard Thurman reminds us, the Christmas mood is not an individual experience, but one that is shared with others. The birth of Jesus was not kept silent; the star shone and the cosmos participated, the angels sang, and the shepherds declared his birth. All of creation announced the coming of the Light, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The mood of Christmas reminds us that every time a hand reaches out to help another, that is Christmas. Every time someone puts anger aside and strives for understanding that is Christmas. Every time people forget their differences and realize their love for each other, that is Christmas. May this Christmas bring us closer to the spirit of human understanding. Closer to the blessing of peace. Closer to experiencing the mood of Christmas not for just a day, but for the rest of the year.

I pray that you find your way to a very Merry Christmas this day. Amen