

“NO PROBLEM CAN BE SOLVED AT THE SAME LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS THAT CREATED IT”

**A Homily by the Rev. Dr. Arthur M. Suggs
Delivered on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2014**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“No Problem Can Be Solved at the Same Level Of Consciousness that Created It”

That’s a quote from Albert Einstein. One of the inside jokes in this church is that I try to throw in one Einstein quote per sermon. And so there you have it: “No problem can be solved at the same level of consciousness that created it.”

The movie, “The Theory of Everything” (I know that most of you have probably not seen it.) is about Stephen Hawking, a theoretical physicist and cosmologist. In it there’s a moment when Hawking mentions what he’s working on at the time. He says, “Well, I’m working on disproving what I had already proved in my dissertation.” Seriously!?! Here’s an extraordinary genius, who wrote his doctoral dissertation under the title “Properties of Expanding Universes.” Later on in his career, which in real time is only a few years ago, he went about disproving his own earlier thesis.

This shows something about science that’s important because what science attempts to do is to elevate and deepen and broaden our understanding of the natural world. In addition, our theology, our spirituality adds height and depth and breadth to our lives.

I suggest that this is also what Christmas does for us if we allow it to do so, if we look beneath the surface.

Consider These Six Facets of the Christmas Story

I’m going to put them together quickly, but here are six different facets of this diamond that we call Christmas. On the face of it, some of these views will seem contradictory, perhaps even absurd, yet they point to something beyond our normal thinking, as Einstein was getting at in the quote, that might help solve our problematical paradoxes.

📖 Number One. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a child. Luke, Matthew, and Isaiah all have that in common, as well as many other stories.

📖 Number Two, also from Isaiah, Chapter 9: A shoot shall come forth from the stump of Jesse. We’re getting a bit of Easter here. Something fresh and new and alive coming out of something old and dead and cut down. Easter in the Christmas story.

📖 Number Three, from the gospel of John. The light comes into the world, and the

darkness shall not overcome it. We happen to be reading this on one of the coldest – not literally, I realize, but I wrote this days ago – and darkest times of the year, the winter solstice, just a couple days ago. So we celebrate light into darkness.

📖 **Number Four.** This season in our worship, we emphasize incarnation. A great Latin word, it means “making into meat.” We’ve had chile con carne before, “making into meat, which on the face of it seems impossible, a paradox. How can something be both God and human? How can something be both spirit and flesh? I refer you to that Einstein quote one more time – a level of thinking beyond what we’re used to that solves the paradox. And they call his name Emmanuel, “God with us.” Then that same one called Emmanuel calls us brothers and sisters and children of God.

📖 **Number Five.** Christmas is a time when we celebrate the birth of a baby, a little child who will lead the world toward peace. When we hold a baby, we invariably think about new life. We can’t help it. New life and not death. Yet in the second chapter of each gospel – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – his death is foretold. We read that, as an infant, he’s given the gift of myrrh, which is an embalming spice, and before he was two years old, an attempt was made on his life.

📖 **Number Six.** An inner theological paradox of Christmas has even found its way into our popular culture, where on the Peanuts Christmas Special, in the spirit of Isaiah 11, the wolf shall lie down with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and even the beagles shall lie down with the bunnies. It’s a vision of the peaceable kingdom – predator and prey in peace.

Do These Paradoxes Make Any Sense for Us in Our Time?

So now, here again are the six facets of the Christ story: A virgin shall conceive and bear a child; the stump, the shoot coming from the stump of Jesse; the light entering into the darkness; the incarnation notion of spirit and flesh are somehow being together; a birth in the midst of death; and this peaceable kingdom, that vision. Six paradoxes of sorts. Can any of this really make sense for us in our time, in our age? Seriously.

I’d ask you to consider one more paradox, and this one has much more to do with human nature than theology. It has to do with joy on the one hand and seriousness on the other. Having fun being lighthearted versus being somber and solemn. I tend to believe – can’t prove it – but I tend to believe that joy comes to those who take their spirituality, their God, their understandings of the world and nature and life with great resolution.

When we soberly contemplate divinity in both word and deed, the heart lightens and joy creeps into even the crustiest of stooges. What I have witnessed over the years is that dancing at the reception somehow seems particularly joyful for couples who were completely serious when making their vows.

**My Christmas Wish: That the Context of Today's World
Will Knock You Down Hard and then Pick You up**

And so now, in the context of theology as I went over those six different points; in the context of racial strife, which is rampant in our country at the moment; in the context of global warming, which we are experiencing now; (It's about 45 degrees outside right now.) but also in the context of a hundred years ago, on this very night was the Christmas truce between opposing armies in World War I; in the context of a few decades, a few millennia, one century . . .

. . . In that context, my Christmas wish this year is that the full impact of what we celebrate in this season would hit you, would hit you hard, knock you down and then pick you up, that the full weight of God's glory in the Nativity would bear down upon you and thereby lighten your load.

Amen.