

One of the things I enjoy a lot is going to the movies - the big screen, the surround sound, the images and words which we see and hear can be entertaining, disturbing, challenging - at times the movies force us to think about the important issues of the day however they often present a very strange and peculiar version of reality.

Let me give you some examples of Hollywood's "odd" reality:

In the movies... Every grocery bag contains at least one stick of French bread.

In the movies... If you decide to start dancing in the street, everyone you bump into will also know all the steps.

In the movies... A man will show no pain while taking the most ferocious beating but will wince when a woman tries to clean his wounds.

In the movies... The Eiffel Tower can be seen from any window in Paris.

In the movies... It is always possible to park directly outside the building you are visiting.

In the movies... Nearly everyone speaks English, no matter where they are from. Even aliens from outer space, despite the fact they have never been to Earth, seen an Earthling, or even heard of Earth or Earthlings.

In the movies... Any lock can be picked with a credit card or a paper clip - unless it's the door to a burning building with someone trapped inside.

In the movies... All bombs are fitted with electronic timing devices with large red readouts so you know exactly when they will go off.

That is the way things are in the movies... reality - is of course - different - very different.

The event we celebrate tonight and in this Christmas season is not Hollywood - it is reality. The birth of Jesus as the Christ of God is as real as it gets. The coming of the Son of God born in Bethlehem's stable is all about reality - God's reality and our reality. The advent of the Savior of the world in human flesh is indeed the ground and the beginning of everything that is truly real.

In the birth of Jesus God becomes yet more real so that we might see God as God truly is - in the Incarnation, God taking on human flesh, God has cut through all the confusion and come to us in a way that we can understand and grasp hold of. The Child in the manger is one of us, truly human.... yet at the same time this child is God, truly God.

The Christmas story and message which circles our world tonight declares that in the birth of Jesus we can see God as God truly is, we can see the reality of the God who is Love and because of this love is the Savior of us all. The news of Jesus' birth means an end to speculation, an end to doubt, an end to uncertainty - God has come, the God who is love is here to share mercy and grace, to heal us of all that harms us and divides from each other and from God.

To you, this very night, in David's town - a Savior - Christ the Lord. God as reality!

This Jesus, born to bring us new life, second birth, life eternal, invites all of us to live into reality, to stop pretending, to take God at face value, the face of God we see in Jesus Christ.

In the world of the New Testament the great theaters and dramas of Greece involved actors wearing masks as they played various roles in a play. These masks, often elaborate, defined the character being portrayed; they hid the real person in order that the audience might focus on the character.

We can liken the birth of our Savior to God taking off God's mask in order that we can see God as God really is. In like manner the birth of our Savior asks each and all of us to take off the masks we wear in order that we can be who we truly are and allow God to change us and re-make us.

It is the case that we wear many masks to protect us, to help us to cope with the tragedy of our lives, to prevent others from seeing exactly what is going on inside of us, to help us keep a respectable distance from others just in case we will be hurt. Some of us sometimes wear so many different masks in different parts of our lives that we find it difficult to know who we really are - our hope is that our masks will hide our pain; make us more acceptable to other people; help us hide from issues and concerns that drag the life from us. That is our hope but we know don't we that this is a vain hope, because we keep trying on new masks but all they do is make matters worse because they inhibit our vision, they shut us off from one another, they stop others seeing the light of our eyes, they hide the reality which is our life, they close off the possibility of an encounter with the reality of God in the person of Jesus.

This Christmas recognizing that God is unmasked and has to come us as one of us we need to do the same - we need to take off our masks, or more correctly we need to ask God to help us as we take off every mask we wear - the ones we wear at home, when we are with our families and friends; the ones we wear at work or when socializing; the masks we wear in church; the masks we wear in a vain attempt to hide from ourselves.

This Christmas we are all invited to stand unmasked before the unmasked God. It is when we see and meet and are greeted face to Face, person to Person, life to Life by God that the enduring miracle of Christ can take root in our lives.

The Good news of our Savior's birth is this - standing unmasked before an unmasked God we will discover the truth, the reality, which alone can change our lives, and bring us hope and peace and joy. That truth, that reality is this: in Jesus Christ God loves us, God loves you utterly; in Jesus Christ God loves us, God loves you incessantly; in Jesus Christ God loves us, God loves you absolutely; in Jesus Christ despite all that is wrong with the way we are God has and does and will love us and God loves you and offers light and love to dawn upon us all and upon you.

This Christmas, God invites you - to peel away - to remove - to take off - to lay down - to put away - the masks you have grown used to wearing and gaze on the unquenchable love of God in the face of Jesus - born to die, that you may never die; born to bring you to a new birth; born to be your way, your truth, your life - born to be your Lord, to be your Savior.

To you, this very night, in David's town - a Savior - Christ the Lord. God unmasked and unmasking - the reality of love - the hope of this year and every year - even now let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened. And let us be forever changed because in Jesus Christ God has freed us, and forgiven us, and loves us and asks us to allow God's reality to be expressed in how we live - by faith, with love, and compassion, in community, with a passion for justice, mercy and peace. Amen.