

## GENERAL (PRESBYTER) REFLECTIONS DECEMBER 7, 2010

Friends, it's that time of year again. I recently received a Christmas letter from one of my colleagues. In it he asks, "Why do we celebrate Christmas?" In good church officer language he reminds us, "The answer to this question is mainly existential but includes theological and biblical backgrounds." Now I don't know about you, but I just got back from visiting my granddaughter and that's the same explanation I gave her!

Actually, it's not a bad question, because my granddaughter was explaining the whole thing to her parents and grandparents one night. You see, Santa lives at the North Pole and puts on the whole Christmas thing with gifts and lights and such. And Jesus lives there with him and helps! Now, to be fair, my granddaughter is only 2 years old. But isn't that a good indication of the confusion in the world today.

Why do we celebrate Christmas? Because the birth of Christ, the Incarnation, God with us in the person of Jesus, is the center and beginning of who we are as Christians. Sadly, many people do not progress in their theology any further than the cute and cuddly infant Jesus. We need to understand his entire ministry, including his suffering, his sacrifice, and his exaltation, if we are to understand more fully the revelation which begins with Christmas. And that, my friends, is part of our job, to tell the whole story of the Gospel to all we meet.

Perhaps, however, this is also a good time to ask what we are all about. What are you and I doing with the gift of grace come to us in Christ Jesus our Lord? How does that inform who we are, not just on Sunday morning, but throughout the week?

And how do our congregations reflect the full witness of God's saving grace. How do we help those who come to us move past the lights and carols of the holiday celebrations; how do we help them discover their calling as heirs of the promise and disciples of Christ?

More importantly, what does it mean for us as a presbytery? How do we put flesh on the Christ story throughout the year? How do we best support our congregations and their leaders as they stand before the world to proclaim that the hope and joy of Christmas are ours year-round?

I was at a meeting recently in which a General Assembly staff person said that he has a new favorite prayer - the Jehoshaphat prayer. You'll find this story in the books of Kings and Chronicles. When faced with battle upon battle with powerful foes, Jehoshaphat summons a prophet to give the nation a sign on the eve of war. The prophet delivers the wisdom of God, to trust not in the might of Judah but rather in the power of God to deliver. And Jehoshaphat's prayer was, "Lord, we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" (2 Chron 20:12).

I do not know what this presbytery is going to look like in two or three years. I do not know how we are going to get there. I do know that the presbytery of tomorrow is going to be more relational than connectional, and it's going to be more about resources and networks than pronouncements and rules. And I also know this, that we will get there, only as we keep our eyes on Christ. May this be our Christmas prayer this season and into the new year!