



# TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*on the Branford Green*

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

## ***Christmas Blessings Christmas Day, 2010***

**The Rev. Sharon Gracen**

Blessings to you this Christmas morning. This quiet and gentle day is a time of great blessing, blessing of birth and being. There is no other story like this one – no other people, at any point in history, has known kind of blessing. Never before or since has God forsaken the grandeur of transcendent heaven to enter infancy and vulnerability.

We know that this is a blessing but what do we mean by that? The Bible speaks of many different forms of blessing. In the Book of Genesis at creation, God blessed the creatures that he made. He regarded them with joy and pride. God blessed the family of Noah after the flood. They enjoyed particular attention from God because God chose to rebuild the human family through them. Nature's abundance is considered a blessing to humankind. People are blessed when their crops are good and their children are numerous. In Hebrew, the verb *barak* means to but can also mean kneel. A related Hebrew word is *berakah* meaning a blessing or a gift. Combining those various ingredients to bless becomes to bring a gift to another while kneeling out of respect. The extended meaning of this word is to do or give something of value to another. God "blesses" us by providing for our needs and we in turn "bless" God by giving him of ourselves.

Blessing implies a relationship. There is one who blesses and one who is blessed. Another form of blessing from the Bible is the paternal blessing conferred on the eldest son – the one to receive the inheritance and the largest portion of goods to continue the survival of the clan – but also something less tangible. It is a special place of favor in a father's heart. The best that the father has to give is passed onto the one who will honor it and in turn bless others.

Again in the book of Genesis, God tells Abraham that through him, all the families of the world will be blessed. Abraham, an old man with his equally aged wife Sarah are told that they will have a child that will cast them into the future. The promise of God is that their offspring will be more numerous than the stars and that in them and through them, all the families of the earth will be blessed. We are of Abraham's progeny and we can claim this expectation for our generation. For us today – this patriarch held in common with Judaism, Christianity and Islam embodies the hope of real blessing in the future. The roots of our faith, our spiritual gene-pool, give us hope for our peaceful co-existence on this combative earth.



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I have my own definition of blessing and blessedness. I think that to be blessed is to be fully known by and to dwell in the gaze of another. It is to be held in the mindfulness and loving attention of that other. It is from this secure place that all good things flow because in the presence of blessing, we thrive. We have the space and security to express our best nature. When we know ourselves to be blessed, we can do anything. We go from strength to strength as we gather confidence and exercise our own creativity. Then, we become a blessing to others. The people of ancient Israel were told that they were to be a nation of priests, bringing others to the knowledge and love of God.

This last brings us to the special blessing of Christmas for on this day, in Jesus, God becomes flesh and dwells among us. Never has a god done such an outrageous thing. We human creatures are a stubborn lot and we do not readily accept that we are known and held in the loving attention by one so far away. So what did God do? God came to us to say, I know you and with these child's eye, I see you. I will look on you and love you. I will see you as you are and I will continue to love you, no matter what you do. In the offer of this treasure, we are undone. Our defenses are rendered ridiculous – for we need not protest ourselves from such a gift.

If we can enter into the spirit of the gift and become communicators of the Word that is Love, we can find no reason to shout at each other, why would we do something so noisy that would disturb the peace of this day and the slumbering infant god. There will be plenty of time to discover the delights of this gift, this child – how sweet and smiling he is, how curious and how ready to smile at us. This is the day to enjoy and blessing and rest in it. Those newborn eyes will open and look at our faces and we will be known by God. Are we ready for that?

You have felt it at other times in the presence and gaze of a loved one. In receiving a gift that touches your heart, especially one that you know that you didn't earn and really don't deserve. That's blessing. Christmas assures us that we have God's full attention. The focus of the Divine concern is turned to us. That is Christmas; we receive the gift of being known by God in a way that is no longer Creator and creature but one that is profoundly more intimate, as if we dwell inside each other. There are no secrets, no shyness, and no shame. It is peaceful confidence and an expanding joy. Hold on to it, it is yours to keep; it is yours to breathe in and make part of you. It is also yours to give. Give it away so that someone else will feel known, cherished and loved. You are the one to whom the Word is spoken, hear it and believe in it. You will never be the same. Bless you this Christmas morning.