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Christmas Eve 2017 Litany: A Three-Voice Dramatic Reading

Rick Pryce¹

This was the sermon at the Lunenburg Lutheran Parish Christmas Eve service in 2017.

- 1 – Mary
- 2 – Joseph
- 3 – Shepherds
- 1 – Three witnesses
- 2 – Three perspectives
- 3 – Three voices
- 1 – Calling us tonight
- 2 – Calling us to the story
- 3 – Calling us to hear
- 1 – To pause
- 2 – To listen
- 3 – To reflect
- All – To respond

[Pause]

- 1 – Mary
- 2 – The mother of Jesus
- 3 – The mother of our Lord
- 1 – The *un-wed* mother of God
- 2 – A girl, really
- 3 – Probably no more than sixteen, and possibly younger
- 1 – A girl who said “Yes”
- 2 – “Yes” to God
- 3 – “Yes” to scandal
- 1 – “Yes” to risk
- 2 – “Yes” to the possibility of being ostracized by her family
- 3 – “Yes” to the possibility of being abandoned by her fiancé
- 1 – “Yes” to the possibility of being killed for being unfaithful
- 2 – A girl who said “Yes”
- 3 – “Yes” to God
- 1 – Mary
- 2 – The mother of Jesus
- 3 – The mother of our Lord
- 1 – Was no shrinking violet

¹ Rick Pryce is Pastor of Lunenburg Lutheran Parish in Lunenburg, NS, and a former member of Interfaith Grand River.

- 2 – Placid, submissive, quietly taking what was dealt
- 3 – Softly sitting in the dark, singing soothing lullabies
- All – Not *her*!
- 1 – Mary, the mother of Jesus
- 2 – Was, in fact, a burning flame
- 3 – Was, in fact, a prophet of justice
- 1 – Was, in fact, a voice crying out in the wilderness
- 2 – Upsetting the apple cart
- 3 – Overturning the status quo
- 1 – Heralding the new creation
- 2 – Where justice and peace are the norm
- 3 – And foreigners are welcome
- 1 – Where the hungry are fed
- 2 – And the rich are turned away
- 3 – Where the poor are embraced
- 1 – And the mighty are stripped of their strength
- 2 – Where the anonymous masses are named by God
- 3 – And the arrogant are reduced to nothing

[Pause]

- 1 – Joseph
- 2 – The father of Jesus
- 3 – The father of our Lord
- 1 – Stoic
- 2 – Quiet
- 3 – Worker
- 1 – Provider
- 2 – Protector
- 3 – Dreamer
- 1 – Always in the background
- 2 – Always the silent partner
- 3 – Always in the shadows, behind the mother and child
- All – However!
- 1 – He is just as crucial to the story
- 2 – He is just as important
- 3 – And he is just as dangerous
- All – Yes, dangerous!
- 1 – Because he, too, said “Yes”
- 2 – “Yes” to God
- 3 – “Yes” to scandal
- 1 – “Yes” to risk
- 2 – “Yes” to accepting a wife who would be regarded as tainted
- 3 – “Yes” to public mistrust of his *own* standing and behaviour
- 1 – “Yes” to having to confront his own jealousies and fears
- 2 – Joseph, the honourable man

3 – Joseph, the radical lover
1 – Joseph, the overthrower of the expected
2 – Who refused to let suspicion set his agenda
3 – Who refuse to let fear dictate his response
1 – Also burned with divine flame
2 – Was also consumed with a vision of justice
3 – In which all are welcome
1 – *All* are welcome
2 – No matter how disruptive they might be
3 – Joseph welcomed the Christ-child into his own family
1 – And let go of the need for revenge
2 – And let go of the desire for retribution
3 – And let go of being in control of his life
1 – And lovingly
2 – Faithfully
3 – Dangerously
1 – Embraced his dangerous wife
2 – Embraced her dangerous son
3 – Embraced the dangerous new creation
All – Coming to birth in front of him

[Pause]

1 – Shepherds
2 – The first witnesses
3 – First recipients of the Good News
1 – Glad singers of tidings
2 – Joyful tellers to all who would listen
3 – Praising and thanking God for what they had seen and heard
1 – Shepherds
2 – Biblical symbol of those who care
3 – Protectors of the vulnerable
1 – Leading their flocks
2 – Feeding their sheep
3 – Finding green pastures in which their charges can find rest
1 – But *these* shepherds are dangerous
2 – *These* shepherds upset the status quo
3 – *These* shepherds overthrow what passes for normal
1 – *Not* by what they *did*
2 – *Not* by saying “Yes”
3 – *Not* by their singing and telling and praising
1 – These shepherds are dangerous because of what happened *TO* them
2 – Because of what they were *told*
3 – Because it was *shepherds* who were told it
All – Because of *Who. They. Were.*

[Short pause]

- 1 – We need to remember the truth about shepherds
2 – In spite of all the good PR
3 – And biblical imagery
1 – They were assumed to be lazy
2 – Which might have been true
3 – They were portrayed as dirty
1 – Which was *probably* true
2 – They were regarded as smelly
3 – Which was *certainly* true!
1 – They were, in fact, viewed as outsiders
2 – As less than important
3 – As undesirable
1 – And *these* shepherds were also *unreliable*
2 – Remember what happened when they had their vision?
3 – Remember how they responded?
1 – They *ran*!
2 – They *left their flock*!
3 – They *abandoned their duty*!
All – They had *one job*!
1 – “Stay with the sheep!”
2 – “Care for the sheep!”
3 – “Don’t leave the sheep!”
1 – And they left
2 – They ran off
3 – Leaving their livelihood
1 – Or possibly, even worse, leaving someone *else’s* livelihood
2 – In order to see a baby
3 – The child of an un-wed mother
1 – The child of a radical father
2 – Who had been born a nobody
3 – Just like them
All – *Just. Like. Them.*
1 – Just
2 – Like
3 – Us

[Short pause]

- 1 – The angels came to shepherds
2 – Lazy
3 – Dirty
1 – Smelly
2 – Unreliable
3 – Shepherds

- 1 – Saying, “To *you* is born a Saviour.”
- 2 – To *you*
- 3 – To *you*
- 1 – A dangerous
- 2 – Scandalous
- 3 – Risky
- 1 – Saviour
- 2 – Through whom God says “Yes”
- 3 – To shepherds
- 1 – And outsiders
- 2 – And strangers
- 3 – And everyone who is considered “Other”

[*Pause*]

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- 3 – To reflect
- All – To respond
- 1 – Respond to the flame of justice burning within
- 2 – Respond to the new creation being born in front of us
- 3 – Respond with joy to the Good News being sung to us
- 1 – The lowly are regarded with favour
- 2 – The fearful are shown mercy
- 3 – The weak are lifted up
- 1 – The hungry are fed
- 2 – The outsiders are welcomed
- 3 – And the dangerous
- 1 – Scandalous
- 2 – Risky
- 3 – Promise of love
- 1 – Is fulfilled

[*Short pause*]

2 – In you

[Short pause]

3 – This night.

[Short pause]

All – Amen.