

Entering the mystery...again. The first in a series of sermons based upon The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, preached at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, November 26, 2017 by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: ISAIAH 9:2, 6-7
JOHN 1:1-5

Those of you who have read C. S. Lewis' The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,

Know it begins far less dramatically than the movie version we have just seen.

There are no bombing scenes from WWII London—only a few words to give the reader the context of why Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy find themselves in a country house inhabited by an old Professor,

His housekeeper, Mrs. Mcready

And 3 servants

It is a house in which there is a wardrobe, or clothes closet that is the portal into the wonderful yet mysterious land of Narnia

A land that when the Pevensie children enter it is still under the spell of the White Witch

A spell that takes the form of never ending winter

A winter not of snow sports and outdoor rambling

Rather,

A winter that is cold, dull and endlessly oppressive

A winter that lasts not just a season, but a winter we are told has been in place for a 100 years.

"Always winter and never Christmas" is one of the book's tag lines

For the Sundays before Christmas – Christ the King (this morning) and then the 4 Sundays of Advent, we are going to move between two worlds – the world that once again prepares and waits for celebrating the birth of Jesus – our Lord and Saviour

And waits in hope for his promised return

And the world of C.S. Lewis' Narnia –as described in his first written but second in the series of books from the Narnia Chronicles-- |The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.

Question: Why not JUST talk about Jesus coming as a baby in Bethlehem and look forward to his second coming as Risen Lord of the Church

Why add this other story – a book written for children no less to THE STORY?

Good and legitimate questions.

I am glad you posed them.

For most of us, not overwhelmed by ‘retail Christmas’ we still have a sense of the quiet mystery,

Awe and wonder about the Christmas story
About the birth of Jesus

It and not the tinsel, Christmas musak and heightened sentimentalism is what we look forward to and celebrate

Something of the essential Christmas season persists

The mysterious and wonderful announcement by the angel Gabriel that Mary will bear a son – God’s son – Jesus

The self sacrifice of Mary and Joseph to let the baby enter and become part of their lives

The enormity of God’s love in this action

People still tend to be more generous with their money and their time during this season,

Smile more readily as they walk down crowded streets

Some may even make efforts at reconciliation with those they have wronged

To most then in our consumer driven society, it seems somehow utterly wrong that, at Christmas

time, any person should be alone or hungry or any child should be without some gifts...

Yet, we all know how easy it can be if we become too absorbed in the tyranny of the immediate

And the commercialism of Christmas does this with increasing stridency.

It is too easy to lose or to have eroded the sense of wonder, mystery, awesomeness of the birth narratives of Jesus

Far too easy to say – that was then – this is now
We have no time for such things

There are no longer mysteries in this life, my life, anyway!

I feel very sad when I hear such things,
behavior that reflects such an attitude – especially
from church folk.

For they have allowed themselves to live totally on
the horizontal,

Without acknowledging the existence of a vertical
That is – same old, same old – without
acknowledging and looking in expectation for those
time when God truly does break into our everyday
lives.

True?

So again,

Why add another story – specifically TLWW to this
year's countdown toward Christmas Sunday

Because I believe that TLWW as well as the other books in the Chronicles help us to *rinse out what is stale in our thinking about Christianity.*

TLWW allows us,

As we engage and enter into the story to wonder – I wonder what it would be like to enter into a world under a curse of “always winter and never Christmas’>

I wonder what it would like to feel betrayed by one you thought to be good

I wonder what it would be like to hear a story about One promised to remove the Witch’s curse

I wonder what it would be like to meet face to face “one who is not safe, but he’s good”

I wonder what it would be like to see the curse of
“always winter, but never Christmas” begin the
end – with budding trees, dark grey skies becoming
blue again

I even wonder what it is like to be Peter, Susan,
Edmund and Lucy – to go through a door into a
reality that is bigger than the one they have left
behind.

I wonder

Let us be quite clear TLWW with its fauns,
centaurs, satyrs, giants, dwarfs, phoenixes, beavers
that talk, a witch, Father Christmas and of course
it's great lion, Aslan

IS NOT an allegory to the Christian storh

That is,

No character in TLWW has a Biblical counterpart.

Lewis made it very clear that this or any of the other of the Chronicles was not an allegory to the scriptures

As a literary scholar, Lewis borrowed from a whole host of traditions and eras for the Narnia stories

We will mention these over the next few weeks

It was though the Christian story that most dominated Lewis' life and writings so that when he wrote, THE STORY was just part of who he was.

He was steeped in the Biblical story.

With TLWW Lewis set out to write a story for children – that the book has so many allusions to

the Christian story is a product of absorbed and held convictions – not intent

And deliberate design.

As TLWW begins with a mysterious wardrobe that is a portal to the land of Narnia,

The New Testament picks up the story with the birth of Jesus.

Jesus is born into a world that is out of joint

A world where harmony is not the default position, but rather a world under “a curse” if you will.

But like our world, Narnia is not totally lost to the curse.

A world where it is “always winter and never Christmas’

There are mysterious and deep things in play.

I cannot read TLWW or see the movie and not see the lamppost as a symbol of hope in a land of winter darkness – in the Lewis' story and in OUR story.

There it is in the midst of the winter gloom – shining as a guide post or marker....

**The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
Those who lived in the land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)**

Or from John's Gospel – that begins not with a birth narrative, but with the cosmic importance of God's action in sending Jesus Christ to be among us.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made

that has been made.⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it.

In both declarations, as in TLWW, there is no preamble or lead up.

The light is just there and it will not be overpowered or put out by the darkness.

Here is an example of *wonder and mystery* –
 light that is just there
 Light that is not consumed
 Light that guides and is an important marker
 In TLWW that lit lamppost in the forest is a guide
 for Lucy and Tumnus
 It is what the children see when they all enter
 Narnia

That is the light Edmund notices, but pays little attention.

MYSTERY AND WONDER...

In our lives – we are reminded especially at this time of the year how lavish is God’s love for us.

God sending the Light into our lives in spite of the extent of the darkness of this world in which we live.

How does Maltbie Babcock phrase it in his hymn, This is my Father’s world...

That though the wrong, seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet

With greater and firmer conviction based upon study, observation and experience, I believe that one of the most underrated sources of wonder and

mystery in this life is that the Light which is God continues to shine in this often pretty dark world in which we live

Surrounded as we are by random or capricious violence,

Examples of injustice and unfairness

Often overwhelming examples of “it’s just not right”

Behaviours of indifference or disengagement with the wider world -not my problem!

Where looking out for #1 is the watch phrase

The light shining in the darkness not being overcome is a tremendous source of hope.

It is a reminder that God is in control.

He will not let us be totally consumed by this world's darkness – whatever form that darkness takes.

He is with us in the midst of the deepest and most oppressive darkness

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe pivots on 4 children who enter a mysterious land called Narnia.

The first thing they see upon entering is a lit lamp in a lamppost.

Giving light in the gloom

Our story as God's people continues to pivot on
God's action and love toward us first.

Our lives then are always a response to that action
and love.

How shall we respond to God's light – baby born in
Bethlehem

And someday returning Risen Lord of the Church
and of time and history.