

Christmas Eve  
December 24, 2015 (11:00 pm)  
The Rev. Robert H. Malm

## The Journey of Love

*Alleluia! Unto us a child is born. Oh, come let us adore Him.*

I can only imagine Mary's response, Mary's feelings when Joseph told her that they would have to go to Bethlehem; travel over 100 miles from Nazareth to Joseph's family's, King David's, home town just outside of Jerusalem. Mary was several months pregnant. She couldn't walk all that way, and even if they both rode on donkeys, the journey would take several weeks.

Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem is at the center of the Christmas story. We also think of the distances the wise men, mysterious kings from the East, traveled. And even the shepherds had to walk several 100 yards or more to see the baby.

At Christmas, with the birth of Christ, everyone is on the move, travelling, making a journey. For some it may mean a physical distance traveled. I'm sure many who come to Grace at Christmas have come from outside Alexandria, outside Virginia, to visit family and friends. Many of our parishioners are travelling or will travel in the days ahead.

But Christmas, for all of us, is much more than thinking about or making a physical journey. The birth of Jesus Christ enters into our lives and leads us on a spiritual journey – we might call it the journey of love.

Christina Rossetti was born in 1830 into a family of Italian refugees who had found a new home in London. Her father became a professor at Kings College and Christina grew up loving to write. She had her first poetry published when she was 12.

In her early adult years her father became extremely ill and died. The family struggled to survive financially. Christina's own health declined, and eventually she battled cancer.

Yet in all of this she continued to write. She also became devoted to the Catholic revival moment, the Oxford movement, in the Church of England. In the hymnal we have two Christmas hymns she wrote – we're not singing either tonight and I guess we shouldn't sing "In the bleak midwinter" (112) at all this year, but I do hope during the next 12 days we will sing "Love came down at Christmas" (84). Christina Rossetti knew that Christmas is a journey of love. Love comes down at Christmas.

Of course, it all begins with the incredible journey God makes through Jesus to be born for us. Love incarnate is the Baby Jesus, who becomes the boy, and then the man, Jesus, who shows us the power of love through the journey of his life, death and resurrection. The power of love starts at Christmas; it continues through Easter. The journey has changed the world for over 2000 years. It has changed you and it has changed me.

Tonight we celebrate the physical birth of the Incarnate Son of God, yet we also celebrate the daily birth of God's love in our hearts, our lives, our world. Just as love grows in the "*word made flesh*," in the human Jesus, so love can grow in each one of us.

Love enlarges life. Love makes life bigger. Love is stronger than death. Love continues even after physical life is over. In some ways I love my Dad more this Christmas than ever before. He died last March. I felt the same last Christmas about my mother, who died in the spring of 2014. In some ways I love them both more.

We don't journey to Bethlehem, to Christmas, without knowing that love will change us. And we can't be sure where this love will lead us. Love led Mary and Joseph to protect their son, help him to grow, give him the tradition of Judaism that would guide him and help him to grow in faith, hope and love.

Love led the wise men home by a different route. They knew they could not go back to Herod. Love led the shepherds to go and tell all that they had seen and heard. Where will love lead us? How will love change us?

These great liturgies, this beautiful music, the wonderful decorations here and in our homes, the presents we give and receive, our relationships with family and friends, remind us that Christmas is all about loving God and loving what God does. Christina Rossetti knew this when she died of cancer at the age of 64.

Mary knew this as she joined the beloved disciple, John, at the Cross, watching her son die. The journey of love leads us to God and to one another. It leads us to birth and to death and to eternity. So let us love God and love all that God does for us and this world.

*Alleluia! Unto us a child is born. Oh, come let us adore Him.*

Isaiah 9:2-4, 6-7

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-20

John 1:1-14