

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
Christmas Eve 2016 5:30 pm service
The Rev. Grayce O'Neill Rowe

Today I want to tell you a story about a special cat – the Christmas Cat.

It seems that one December, several years ago, a little cat came home to find that his nice, warm home was all locked up, the house was empty, his family was not there. After several days he realized that his family had moved away and left him. The little cat was very sad. He started walking and he wandered deep into the woods. It was very cold and the wind was blowing. The little cat was cold and was very frightened.

On the edge of the woods was a nice, warm farmhouse where Nate and Jason lived. They were getting ready for bed – it was Christmas Eve and so before they went to bed they stood in front of their manger scene that they had set up near their fireplace so that the baby Jesus would be warm. They had placed some of their toy animals near the manger. A toy dog and a stuffed donkey. As they were looking at the manger where Baby Jesus would lay, the wind threw snow against the windows of their warm home. Nate said, "I'm glad our animals are in a nice, warm barn. I hope that all animals are warm tonight." Nate and Jason then went on to bed.

Meanwhile, in the woods, our little cat was shivering with cold when all of a sudden he heard some bells. He went to find out where the sound came from. He saw a man on a sled who was handing out fruits and berries to all of the wild animals. When the man saw the little cat he picked him up and put him in a basket on his sled where he knew he would be warm. He started heading back to the edge of the woods.

On Christmas morning Nate and Jason woke up and raced downstairs to the fireplace to find their Christmas stockings. All of a sudden they saw a little cat, our little Christmas cat, curled up in a chair close to the fire. Jason could not understand where this cat could have come from. Nate, his older and wiser brother said that he was not sure but that on Christmas wonderful and unexpected things can happen. The little cat began to purr and as he looked at the manger and the baby Jesus he thought that he heard the distant sound of bells.

On Christmas wonderful and unexpected things can happen. The birth of Jesus, 2,000 years ago, wonderful but for many unexpected; for the Messiah was not born in the way that many had expected. The birth of the Messiah in a manger surrounded by animals was not at all what was expected. Many missed it altogether. But, to others, it was the most wonderful thing of all – shepherds shouted in joy, the angels sang in majestic glory! Our Messiah is born.

The birth of Jesus tonight in the year 2016 is wonderful and it is expected. We come together to celebrate this most wonderful event and we shout for joy and sing in majestic glory. But, for each of us, even though we expect Jesus to be born anew tonight, we also realize that Jesus is born into our hearts not only tonight, but tomorrow, next week and the weeks thereafter and that is where the unexpected comes in for the birth of Jesus in our own hearts happens differently for everyone. It may be like for Nate and Jason in our story about the Christmas cat with a special delight under the Christmas tree. Or it may be in the smile of a stranger, or in the call from someone you have not heard from in a long, long time. Jesus might be born in your heart in the midst of forgiveness offered to you or especially in the gift of forgiveness offered by you. Maybe it will be when you put your donation in the Salvation Army's collection pot or when you remember to hold your tongue instead of issuing forth that critical comment. It might be in giving a special child an opportunity that she or he might not otherwise have had, even if that means that things are not done quite up to your expectations.

Jesus is born in so many ways and if you are wondering what that unexpected way might be for you, just remember that with Jesus we CAN expect healing, we can expect new life, forgiveness, with Jesus we can expect an end to suffering and violence, we can expect peace, we can expect joy. Look for these things, work for these things and you will find Jesus born once again.

And so tonight, on this most wonderful night of all nights, I wish a merry, merry Christmas to each of you.

This year, may you have the most wonderful and unexpected Christmas of all!