**Christmas 2022 – Introduction to A Service of Lessons and Carols**

**Psalm 77:11 “I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.”**

 “’Twas the night before Christmas when all through the house not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse…” 1823 – that’s the year “The Night before Christmas” was written, one hundred ninety-nine years ago. A pretty old tradition, wouldn’t you say? But more or less one thousand eight hundred and twenty-three years after the first Christmas. It’s actually a late arrival at the Christmas party.

 Sometime in the century before “The Night before Christmas” Santa Claus became a thing. That’s still a long time after the first Christmas.

 Christmas trees started centuries before Santa, but those lovely evergreens became part of Christmas celebrations way more than a thousand years after the first Christmas.

 St. Nick—not to be confused with Santa Claus, but they were confused and continue to be confused—St. Nick was properly St. Nicholas of Myra, a very devout and generous Christian clergyman who showed up way before the Christmas trees, around 330AD. But he was still more years after the first Christmas than we are after the birth of George Washington.

 About the same time as the original St. Nick, Christians sort of decided, for the sake of uniformity, to celebrate Christmas on December 25th. But it took them 300 plus years after the first Christmas to come to that agreement

 Christmas is older than “The Night before Christmas”, Santa Claus, St. Nick, Christmas trees, Christmas gifts, Christmas celebrations, maybe not reindeer, but long before anybody thought of hooking up reindeer to sleighs. The point is that we tend to define our Christmas by our Christmas traditions. That is the wrong way around! Good Christmas traditions flow out of the original Christmas. And many of our traditions do. But it is important to go back to the source.

 This evening, in our readings, we go to the source, the pure springs high up in the mountains where many people don’t bother to tread. We hear the real thing, the first Christmas, from God’s ancient writings. And we will celebrate what we hear with another good custom that flows out of Christmas: Christmas carols. May God bless you as you hear, not even the meaning of Christmas, but the real thing, the first Christmas.

*[This is a redo of a 2019 Christmas Eve message.]*

*Introduction for the final reading of the Lessons and Carols service, for Titus 2:11-14*

 A message shared—with a couple in a small town, with shepherds out in the fields, with wise and wealthy men in another land. Each had to be told, how else could they know? In each, God’s Spirit led them to believe, to trust. And each responded. Mary nurtured that precious child and took to heart all the strange happenings, while Joseph spent himself in protecting that child. Those blessed according to the counting of this world offered extravagant amounts of time and wealth, while those of scant means excitedly shared all they witnessed, which was just as they had been told. You have heard. Let your thanks be in the measure of God’s blessings in your life.

 *Titus 2:11 The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*