



# Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers  
From the clergy and members  
of Holy Trinity Church  
Forbes Park, Makati

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## Readings for this Sunday:

Old Testament 2 Samuel 7:4,8-16  
Epistle Romans 16:25-27  
Gospel Luke 1:26-38

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Well, Christmas is almost upon us. I'm speaking about church now- not the outside world. We all know that Christmas has been well underway there for some time! Here, though, we're still desperately hanging onto the honorable old season of Advent- a time of quiet anticipation and reflection on what the Christmas event really means.

For this reason, our second reading today, from Paul's letter to the Romans, is really important. He is ending his famous epistle the way he began it: with praise to God. A great part of his life has been given to the spreading of the Gospel in the non-Jewish world. He gives thanks to God for the fact that God has chosen to offer the gift of salvation to everyone, not just the Jews, as the plan had originally seemed to be. And yet, although this general inclusion of the world as potential members of the Kingdom of God came as something of a surprise, Paul reminds us that it only seems that way. We haven't understood God's plan for the world, and we have imagined that it will be only *our* hopes, *our* dreams and *our* expectations that will be fulfilled. God gently, but firmly takes us and, like a father with his still growing children, he shows us that the Kingdom is actually much richer, much more inclusive, much more generous than we had ever thought.

For some, the salvation that did come to the world beginning with the wonderful message of the angel to Mary was so surprising and different that it seemed that God had either changed his mind or come up with a whole new plan for salvation that the one he had first revealed to the Jews. The covenant with Abraham, the rituals and sacrifices of the Temple, and the expectation of a political and very earthly Messiah are the basic premises of the entire Old Testament. It was what Israel hoped for and truly expected from God. That's why it was so hard for many Jews to become Christians: something didn't seem quite right with this "new plan" that God seemed to be introducing: it didn't seem to fit with what they knew from before.

But Paul in today's epistle suggests that it's not a new plan- not a change of mind. "This is only what Scripture has predicted," he writes, "and it is all part of the way the eternal God wants things to be." It may have appeared a secret, he writes, "but now [it is] so clear that it must be broadcast ...everywhere." This can give us a sense of peace, if we let it. True, we must "let God be God": choosing to save us in His own way and in His own time. But the wonder of it is that God has chosen to be much more consistent than we might have believed. The plan of salvation has been unfolding throughout the history of mankind, and more particularly in that of the Jewish people. The birth of the Messiah to the Virgin Mary is part of that plan- a new and surprising option, perhaps, but in keeping with God's consistent will to save humankind using humankind, and more particularly the Son of Man and Son of God, Jesus the Messiah.

Many preachers this Christmas will be talking about surprise and innovation: how God did something totally new in giving Jesus to the world. But I would like us to consider today the consistency of God: His gradual but constant unfolding of the salvation of the world and the way all of it fits together. This is not just for the sake of seeing history as a pleasing unity, it is also to realize that we ourselves fit into that plan: our lives, our hopes and dreams, even our disappointments and failures- all of these things belong to a bigger, fuller and more comprehensive idea in the mind of God about how to bring to fulfillment the unity and salvation of all.

I will not wish you a Christmas of jarring shocks and sudden surprises, except perhaps the ones you find under your Christmas tree. Instead I will wish you a peaceful Christmas in which everything fits together and in which you find yourself to be an important and integral part of a plan that began at the beginning of the world, that continued in the visit of the angel to the Girl in Nazareth, and that for each of us continues in the lives we live by faith and with hope.