

## Do Not Doubt, But Believe

*Jesus said: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*

Most of you, I am sure, have either read the books or seen the movies titled The Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis. It was not until I was in my late 30s that I learned about these books. But it wasn't until much later that I learned about the author. I did not know that the tale he told through the 7 books of the Chronicles was a metaphorical story about Christianity with the lion character named Aslan being a representation of Jesus. C. S. Lewis wrote the Chronicles about 20 years after he had converted to Christianity.

The details of his conversion vary, but, in his own words while on a trip to the zoo one day, he famously said, *"When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did."* The truth is he struggled for years with his doubt even about the existence of God at all. He also famously said, *"I was the most dejected, reluctant convert in all England."*

Though his life did not become a bowl of cherries or a bed of roses because of his conversion, he found so much joy that he wrote a book about it called Surprised by Joy. He was blessed because he *"had come to believe"*.

Doubt!

I have a somewhat famous ancestor (Robert Ingersoll) who proclaimed that atheism is a great way to live but an awful way to die.

In my time as chaplain in our local hospitals I have met with people who were struggling with their faith.

I mention this because this year the 4th Sunday of Advent is also the traditional day, (December 21st), that Saint Thomas the Apostle is remembered on the Episcopal church's liturgical calendar.

I find that the account we read in Matthew this morning about the faith of Joseph is an interesting tension with the story of Saint Thomas which is in the Gospel according to John.

Joseph gets word that the woman he has agreed to take as wife is pregnant and he knows full well he is not the father. He's such a nice guy that he is willing, more or less, to cover for her by **secretly** divorcing her.

But his faith is so strong that when he gets the word from God in a dream that everything is ok, he doesn't question it. He doesn't ask for proof. He just obeys. Thanks be to God!

The Gospel writers do not give many details about Joseph, but by the fact that we know that he was with Jesus until he was 12 years old we can imagine that Joseph felt deeply blessed.

And then, there's Thomas. Thomas didn't get an angel coming to him in a dream; he had his friends, Jesus's disciples telling him that Jesus was alive, that he had risen from the grave—they had seen him! Just the same, Thomas needed proof that they were telling him the truth. Once the truth basically struck him in the face he was convinced. Despite that little faux pax, he was blessed as well. He had the privilege to preach in some of the most ancient of places ever; i.e. Arabia, Persia, even as far as India.

So. What about us?

You and me? Do we have doubts?

I have to admit I am no Mary or Joseph. True, I have not had an angel come to me and I haven't had Jesus in person teaching me. Yep. I have had my times of doubt.

I come back to C. S. Lewis. He did not come to his faith easily. He quite literally tried not to. But something he did do was read, study, discuss, contemplate and then one day it came to him that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection was not a mythological tale but rather an historical fact. There was no angel or magic. He "came to believe". And, as I mentioned, he became a prolific apologist for Christianity. He felt so blessed to know that Jesus Christ was real that he couldn't help but share it with the world.

We, Christians for the past month, have been in preparation for the celebration that remembers the Jesus was born as a human baby some 2000 years ago. But it also reminds us of our faith that though we doubt at times, Jesus's coming again is real so we ring in joy filled with hope and renewed confidence.

What will we do with that? How will we, like Joseph, like Thomas, and like C. S. Lewis joyfully share what we have come to believe without seeing?

Here at St. Barnabas, something we are doing is sharing our faith, with joy, in partnering with Iglesia Luterana Church to help our neighbors who are scared right now; who have had loved ones deported—particularly those who were their financial support deported. As Jesus told his disciples, "*you give them something to eat*".

Who are you inviting into the joy of the Christmas season? Do you have a neighbor or friend or even family member you have been wanting to invite? Now's a great time to take that leap of faith.

Are there other ways you have wanted to serve but have been hesitant—doubting that this is a call from Jesus?

Or maybe this is the time where you do some contemplation on where your faith journey is taking you.

Whatever your doubts, know this: you will be blessed with joy and more when you let go of those doubts and come to the realization that God is calling you into the life and love of Jesus Christ today, tomorrow, and forever. Do not doubt, but believe.

I wonder what **you** will do with all that blessing?