4th Sunday of Advent, Year A, Dec.18, 2016

Isaiah 7:10-14

Psalm 24

Romans 1:1-7

Mathew 1:18-24

Are you anxious over Christmas yet?

Hearing the Gospel story about Joseph and the pregnancy of his Mary shows us that anxiety started way back when preparing for that first Christmas. As of now, we have to worry about presents and family gatherings and the cat crawling up the Christmas tree and knocking it over. Joseph was worried because his girlfriend was pregnant.

Since that first Christmas, St. Paul finds himself in a Roman jail awaiting trial. Even before Christmas, the king of Israel, Ahaz, fights with God prior to the foretelling of Christmas.

Christmas brings out the best in us and gives us, the preparers, the worst of anxiety.

Saturday before last, at the 8:00 A.M. Mass, a lovely lady of ninety-seven had a Mass said for her husband. They had been married for fifty-five years and he had passed on 16 years ago. This close to Christmas, you would think she would be lost in anxiety with Christmas coming up and her husband of so many Christmasses past would not be with her and her family. Yet she was of good disposition and greeted me with a smile and thanked me for saying the Mass for her husband – a righteous Christmas gift to be sure.

It got me thinking about all of us who will be missing loved ones this time around.

Then it got me thinking about time itself. What is past, present and future? Why are we trapped in the present and so sometimes trapped in loss and grief and sadness when we bring to mind loved ones from the past who have passed away?

Scientists tell us that we live in four dimensions – length, width, depth and time, yes, time. They also tell us that there are even more dimensions that are out there somewhere but that is for another discussion. Time is a dimension in which we all live (and scientists do their experiments.) I’m wondering now, can present, past, and future be all happening in the same time? (Scientists do.)

It seems unbelievable for past, present and future to be all in the same place, yet we accept it so readily at times. Say watching Dicken’s “A Christmas Story”. Here we have Ebenezer Scrooge visited by the ghosts of Christmas past, present and yet to come (not to mention Marley’s ghost.) Or “It’s A Wonderful Life” by Capra. George Bailey is visited by Clarence Odbody who brings to the present flashbacks of George’s life and even an alternative reality where George isn’t even born. We accept that past, present and future are all in the present time and watching these movies we go with the flow.

So on Christmas day we can sit by the manger scene in church or sit by the Christmas tree at home and float in the past and in the future in time present. Allow our loved ones of times gone by to be with us, grieving their loss but gaining their presence. While sitting by the manger and the tree we can be with them in the future where we will enjoy their company where death is overcome and tears are wiped away. It’s not weird. It’s reality. And Christmas is no longer a time of mourning. Christmas becomes a present to us.

With the help of scientists, we can accept the confluence of past, present, and future in the present moment. Science firms up our faith. Right here and right now Christ has died; Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. Praying at the manger scene, Jesus asks us to make present his presence as a baby born, his presence as one like us in all things but sin, his redeeming presence and his presence as King of Glory. What a wonderful mystery. What a wonderful life. What a beautiful Christmas story.

And what can we make of St. Nicholas, Santa Claus? He was real. He is real. He will always be real. And he is waiting for his cookie on Christmas Eve.