

Trinity Church
January 4, 2009

Second Sunday of Christmas
RCL Year B, Rite 13 Ceremony

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

Gracious God, you created us in wonder, but you more wonderfully redeemed us and restored our humanity in Jesus Christ. Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbly shared our humanity, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For over a decade now, the youth program here at Trinity Church has been called Journey to Adulthood. We didn't think up that name, or create the resources and structure of the program. It is part of a movement in youth ministry all across the Episcopal Church and beyond. Trinity was one of the first parishes to use Journey to Adulthood in this diocese, and others have come here to learn about and experience the program. Rite 13 is the first two-year segment of Journey to Adulthood, and its crowning moment is the Rite 13 ceremony we celebrate today with nine of our youth, and their friends and family. An important and sacred moment in which we bless them and promise to journey with them into adulthood. As they slowly leave childhood behind, our deep prayer for them is that they will become creative, compassionate, and responsible adults, using the powers and privileges of adulthood to God's glory.

I have always felt that Journey was just the right word and just the right concept for a Christian youth program. There is nothing particularly Christian about parents hoping and praying that the children they have loved so dearly grow up to be good and productive adults. But there is something particularly Christian, uniquely Christian, about journeying.

Our religion began when God told Abraham and Sarah to leave their country and journey with God to the Land of Promise. Their faith and their trust in God was tested every step of the way, but the journey was the means by which they grew into God's care for them.

Moses and the Hebrew people journeyed out of Egypt and slavery, through the Red Sea, through the wilderness, to the mountain of God, who gave them the law. They were delivered by trauma, nearly drowned in the sea, murmured against Moses in the wilderness, suffered hunger and doubt, but came to God on the mountain. They were no people. They became God's people.

Jonah stowed away on a ship bound for Spain to escape God's notice — to run away from home and from God — to escape adulthood, but the sailors found out his misdeed and threw him into the tossing sea, where God swallowed him alive in the belly of the whale and deposited him back where he belonged. Humbled, he took up his rightful journey to adulthood.

Paul was on a journey to kill Christians and destroy the religion of Jesus. I've known several youth who have tried to kill their religion, thinking that to be rid of it would help them to be free to be themselves. Paul was on that journey when Jesus spoke to him in a blinding light and set him straight about Christians and changed his life as he became one of them.

Jesus himself journeyed from Galilee to Jerusalem to lead us, through his death and resurrection, into newness of life.

Yes, journey is the right word, and the right concept for our youth program, because journey is where God meets us. Journey is how God shapes us. Journey, one way or another, leads us into the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity.

And that is the point I want to drive home with you today. Adulthood is nice. I hope that all our youth grow up to be productive adults.

But journey — as Christians experience journey — has only one destination, and that is the knowledge and love of God. The destination is to share the divine life of God, who humbled himself in Christ Jesus to share our humanity. To grow up — to be an adult — is to live in God through Jesus Christ. That is the journey we bless today. Not any journey to adulthood, but we bless you with the journey of Abraham and Moses and Jonah and Paul. The journey of Jesus himself.

Now that is the point, it seems to me, of the story in Matthew's Gospel of the Magi, wandering after a star. Their journeying is little known to us. The end of their journey is clear. All peoples and nations, all wisdom and learning, all human striving is meant to lead us to the same place — to the Christ child. To the divine One who humbled himself to share our humanity. Their journey is an invitation to you to share the divine life of Christ — to live in the divine life of God as wonderfully redeemed and restored human beings, perfected in love, offering your souls and bodies as a gift to God, just as the Magi did.

The best image in all of Scripture for this is the seldom read story of Jesus in the Temple as a young adult. Bless them, Mary and Joseph are running around worrying and searching after Jesus, scared that he was lost, that he was rebelling, that he was going wrong and would never grow up to be anything. Parents do fret. But there is Jesus, just where he is meant to be, about his Father's business, in the Temple of God, sharing the divine life of God as a child of God. At such a young age, he was at journey's end. He was with God. He was God. He dwells in the house of the Lord forever.

Our youth, each one, is fearfully and wonderfully made, as the psalm says. But each one of them has also been even more wonderfully redeemed and restored in Christ. That is the adulthood we hope that they will achieve. That is the blessing we give them from God.

As we celebrate Rite 13 today, we give thanks for the youth of our parish, and pray for them. We give thanks for Kathleen Capcara, Mark and Nancy Nicholson and Joe Rushton in their leadership. And we rejoice that at any age, and in any place, it is not too late to begin our Journey into Christ.