

All right, everybody. Merry Christmas. I'm pretty excited that I get to have this Christmas Eve with all of you, particularly because this is in fact, my first rodeo, as rector here at Saint Christopher's on Christmas Eve. And I'm hoping that you guys will continue to help me out in this service to make it a little different and a little more special at least in relation to what Christmas Eve services looked like to me when I was growing up. I'm excited because the community here at St. Christopher's been teaching me, and by that I mean all you kids out there (in my mind I refer to y'all as gremlins) but you gremlins have been teaching me about the true meaning of Christmas since I landed here back in September.

Y'all have been teaching me about so much, but at its heart, I think y'all've been teaching me about how you can make a home out of anywhere and anyone and more often than not, that home you make with people you never expected is about as good and about as close as what Jesus wants for us as anything.

I think that's a message in the Christmas story too, that the families that matter most are often made up of folks like our parents or siblings or other family as well as the people we never saw coming. For some context on why I think this is part of Christmas, and if anyone was here for blue Christmas, you'll forgive me I hope for reiterating some facts about the Christmas story that I find so very, very coo-coo for cocoa puffs. But it's the facts that help me remember why the story is important and how it reminds all of us, that no matter who we are or where we are, we can love others and be loved by others.

But with that ideal put out there, let us now turn to coo coo cocoapuffs. That notion of the holy family, of Mary and Joseph, having baby Jesus, in a manger was never one that I spent too much time thinking about when I was growing up. I knew that it probably wasn't ideal, wasn't the best, or the cleanest spot to have a baby in. But you know that manger, that we can even see right here, and never look so bad to me.

However, with the advent of Google Maps, and my own experience of trying to find a halfway decent hotel on a road trip, Having a better understanding of what dealing with pregnancy is like, and having walked more than 10 miles in a given day. I have become increasingly angry over the years with that got darn inn keeper. So kids, I'm gonna ask you straight up I want to raise your hand and let me know what you think, how long of a trip do you think it was from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Because you know what the answer is? It was 97 miles. That 16 miles longer than it

would take to walk to the city of Milwaukee. And, it ain't like Joseph and Mary we're driving there on the interstate. They were hoofing it on dirt roads, with the last 20 miles being uphill, while Mary was nine months pregnant. I don't know about you guys, but I get grumpy after being in the car for four hours. I am a passenger princess, Fiona , my wife, has to put up with me caterwauling just a couple hours after we hit the road. And so Mary and Joseph travel for days because that's how long it would've taken for them to get to Bethlehem and they go to the only hotel in town. And that keeper says I'm sorry we ain't got no spot for you.

I would have broken down and cried.

But that's not what we hear about happening. We don't hear about Mary and Joseph being upset or angry, we don't hear about them being resentful towards that innkeeper.

We just hear about how happy they are. And how the party just keeps getting bigger and bigger. The Bible doesn't spend any time on the fact that they're in a stinky old manger instead of a nice hotel. The story focusses on the fact that there's a new born baby who happens to be the messiah.

And you guys know that we'll be talking about what that means all year, how important Jesus is, how much he matters. But for right now. For tonight, look at the people around you. Some are people you know and love. Some are folks you've never seen before in your life. But tonight, we're here together to celebrate Christmas.

That's what you gremlins have been teaching me about Christmas and about what it means to follow Jesus. That this world is full of different, interesting and wonderful people, sometimes strangers. And what a blessing that we get to live life with one another. Thanks for sharing this manger space with all of us tonight. Amen.