



Christian Education

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

Date: 25 December 2005
Title: **"Open for Business."**
Comment: Insert Comment here
Author: The Rev. Tyler A. Strand

Readings for this Sunday:

Old Testament

Epistle Titus 2:11-14

Gospel Luke 2:1-14

Soon before I left the United States to come here, I worked in a small parish in the northwestern suburbs of Chicago. We had perhaps 100 members. North of us a few miles, there was quite another church that had its own campus of landscaped grounds, several lakes, massive buildings and its own police force to manage the traffic at weekend services at which up to 20,000 people attend. It is the famous Willowcreek Church- almost an entire denomination in its own right- that started in a cinema back in the 70's and now influences and inspires congregations all over the world. It was one of the first "mega-churches" and caters specifically to those who have become disillusioned with organized religion. The Sunday services, in fact, are not for the regular members at all; they meet in regional groups during the week. No, the "seeker services" are the ones that fill their enormous auditorium every weekend and entertain with live bands, multi-media shows and a bit of preaching.

Willowcreek made the news again this past week, not because of the services it's offering for Christmas, but because of the lack of them. Willowcreek, along with several other megachurches in the U.S. has decided not to hold services on Christmas Day. Instead, members will be encouraged to stay home with their families. Money that would have gone towards a Christmas Day extravaganza will be used for a series of CD's that people can play at their leisure to get the Christmas

message. It has been a controversial issue, to say the least, and it has inevitably been used by both sides to make points about family values and 'the War on Christmas.' Closing church is seen as a capitulation to the consumer culture: giving people what they want rather than what they might truly need.

Here at Holy Trinity, this question about being open isn't an issue. We are doing what we always do: celebrating our religion's most significant birthday the way our religion has for a couple thousand years. And we will be here tomorrow morning doing it again.

Holy Trinity is open tonight. Yes, it is perfectly possible to celebrate Jesus' Birthday at home. But it would be very rude to presume to celebrate the birthday of a living person without making reference to him, or visiting him or attending the celebration if you are invited. That is why you are here. That is why I am here. We are all invited to this birthday celebration, and we have decided to attend. Not all of us know the guest of honor as well as others, but it doesn't matter: all may attend, all may celebrate, and all may hear again the story about angels and shepherds and a baby born in a far-away place a long time ago.

Does it make any difference that nobody knows what day Jesus was actually born? Does it compromise this celebration to know that the early Church may have co-opted a pagan holiday at this time of year? Not really. Do we get upset about celebrating the Queen's birthday in June? The issue is not the date, but the Person in question. That's why we're here, and that's why we're open.

Holy Trinity is open tonight, not just to give you what you want; but perhaps also to give you something you need. For many it is tradition and nostalgia. Some come to complain- about the format of the service, or the choice of carols or the level of the air conditioning. Some may come with emotional baggage or resentments or sorrows that cloud and distort the official joy of the season. Holy Trinity is open for you, too, because you need to hear in this service not just about babies and holly and ivy, but also about a very unsentimental love that shared itself in bread and wine, not

fruitcake and punch, and that died on a cross and rose again. That, too, is part of Christmas, and that too is a reason that Holy Trinity is open tonight.

No, it never entered into our minds to close tonight or tomorrow. It would have been rude. This is the birthday of God's love born into the world in Jesus Christ. And we have all been invited to attend. We may not have 20,000 people here. (God help us if we did!) But what we lack in numbers, we make up in sincerity and love. Holy Trinity is 'Open for Business.' And our business is to proclaim that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that all who believe in Him will not die forever, but live with Him into eternity.