



CATHEDRAL *of the* INCARNATION

The Christmas Conspiracy Collective, (The Dean imaginatively re-tells the Christmas Story as an “Organizational Transition Meeting”)

Sermon on Christmas Eve, December 24th, 2018

The Very Rev. Michael Sniffen, Dean

Sit, sit, sit - those of you who can find a seat. Sit! Please. Take a load off. Wow. I'm so glad you all made it. It's really packed tonight. Did you have trouble finding the place? I know it's dark out there and the signage is not great.

I wasn't sure the message would get around about the change in meeting time. It's hard to know if shepherds can be relied upon to spread the word anymore - they sort of keep to themselves, but we've had a marketing deal with the shepherds for a long time and we honor our relationships.

We sent a few angels around with fliers, but they are easily distracted by singing and harps, and, well, you know the deal with angels. Especially Gabriel. He's a bit of a diva.

But if you're here, you got the message, so that's great! This is the transition meeting. Um. Our organization has new leadership on the way. Imminently, in fact. I guess you heard that. Our new leader is expected to arrive, well, now! His mother was going to be here to introduce him. She wanted to kind of clear the way, lay the groundwork. We know transitions can be difficult.

Mary's had a tough couple of days though, unfortunately - which is why she couldn't be here herself. She's had to deal with more travel than expected. Her registration didn't go as smoothly as planned. There was a mess-up at the inn, and, well, not to belabor the point, she has a lot on her mind and now she's got her hands full.

But she promises her Son will be with us soon. He just needs to spend some time out of town (most likely Egypt). I'm told it's urgent. But then he'll be back just as fast as you can say 'life threatening camel caravan across open desert to save the life of your firstborn.'

Mary did send over some prepared remarks though - about what our founder has been up to during the transition. He's preparing to pass the baton. All good stuff. Some very effective strategies and tactics. I know all of you are grateful for his devotion to the cause - of heaven on earth.

Let me see, I have her note here somewhere...here it is....

Christ Child Initiative - Transition Memo:

Tasks already completed by founding director, God the Father

1. He has shown strength with his arm.
2. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
3. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones.
4. He has lifted up the lowly.
5. He has filled the hungry with good things.
6. He has sent the rich away empty.
7. He has fulfilled the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.¹

So, all in all, I'd say we're in pretty good shape. Things are headed in the right direction, anyway.

...I'm sorry, I'm seeing some bewilderment on some faces. I think some of you are new. Maybe I should just back up and give an organizational overview in the event that some of you missed our earlier meetings? Would that be helpful? Sure, I'll do that.

So, we are the Christmas Conspiracy Collective. This is the Winter Solstice meeting of our Bethlehem Working Group. I know that's a mouthful. You can just go with "Triple C Bee Wag" (CCC BWG) if you're an acronym person.

And we do apologize that this meeting is a few days late - thank you for your patience. The Solstice was on Friday, but we couldn't get the room. There was a baby shower or something. But here we are. On a Monday.

So, what is the Christmas Conspiracy Collective? I'm so glad you asked!

¹ Luke 1:46-55, The Magnificat

We are a network of well-meaning folks - some would say disciples - committed to implementing a portfolio of long-term community development strategies. We're the 'justice, freedom and peace' people. You might be familiar with some of our successful spin-off groups:

The Turn the Other Cheek Society (TOCS)
The Pray for your Enemies Enclave (PEE)
The Red Sea Rainbow Scouts (RSRS)
The Two by Two Save the Emu Club (2SEC)
Mr. Rogers Neighborhood (TROLLY)
The Mormon Tabernacle Choir (MTC)
Your Grandmother's Dinner Table (GDT)

These groups are pretty much autonomous now - they do their own thing - But they're all connected to us, and we're here to help.

We've been around a long time. We know what we're doing. We work with a lot of non-profits, some minor prophets and all the major prophets, really - that's prophets with a "ph" not an f. Makes all the difference.

You may know some of our longtime community partners and thought leaders: Moses, Elijah, Micah, Martin (goes by MLK now). Romero. Ellen (Turns out she's very Relatable [Netflix Special Here]). Mozart (wrote a lot of our meet-up playlist for tonight). Also, RBG - Don't know her full name - but she's been notoriously helpful with our legal issues. George H.W. Bush - Thousand Points of Light - that was all us.

Anyway, Yahweh, our founder - also goes by Abba, Daddy, the Lord God, Elohim, Adonai, I Am who I Am, Maker and Heaven and Earth, Mother (we don't know why this one seems to upset some people) - s/he laid out our mission way back and it's pretty straightforward, really:

To restore all people to unity with God and each other...²

We're the 'peaceable kingdom' people! Reign of Christ, Kin-dom of God (focusing a lot of attention on 'lion shall lie down with the lamb, little child shall lead them', sort of stuff). That's our work. That's what we do. That's us.

² Mission of the Church, Book of Common Prayer, 1979

So yes, we are the Christmas Conspiracy Collective. We did have a name change a while back, which might be confusing...we went previously as just "God's Chosen People" but that tested as too exclusive in this market.

The new name is getting us a little more traction with the younger demos. Don't get thrown by the word conspiracy. We took it from the Latin - conspirare - to breathe together. Which I rather like. I hope you do too. Someone in communications thought it had the right ring to it without being too 'Lord of the Rings', if you know what I mean. J.R.R. Tolkien was in one of our groups, so I can say that.

Anyway, we're glad you're here for the transition meeting - because this is an important moment and we have some really good initiatives planned with new leadership. Mary has rolled out a very full agenda in which she hopes you will participate. It's ambitious, but she's known to throw a 'Hail Mary' now and then under pressure, and she has been under pressure.

So, what's the game plan? I'm glad you asked! I appreciate all your questions!

We're going to give our new leader some time to grow into his role. His name is Jesus, by the way (also goes by Emmanuel, Prince of Peace, Son of Man, Son of God, the Christ)...we seem to have a thing for leaders with many names. Anyway, he's a Wonderful Counselor, a real Prince of Peace. When he comes among us in great humility, he's going to tee up a whole raft of new project work. And you can join in wherever you find the best fit, really:

Casting out demons
Works of mercy
Everyday Miracles
Selfless love
Treating foreigners like citizens
Turning over tables
Enduring temptations
Forgiving enemies
Loving neighbors
Smiling at strangers
Not being cranky

You name it. If it comes from Love and makes the world a better place, just go for it! You don't need special permission. Just get on with it.

We are planning to encounter some push-back on the Christ Child initiative, though. We're not Pollyanna about that. The whole messiah segment is experiencing lots of volatility. We're being cautious. In fact, we've got a witness already lined up in case we need him. John says he'll do it. Bit of a wild man, but he's ready to testify that Jesus is totally above board - He's a bright light and he's going to enlighten everyone. There's nothing shady going on in the CCC, so there's no need to fear the valley of the shadow of death any more. We're hopeful that this will break through any old ideologies that might have been barriers to going wherever the work is.

Just do us a favor - do me a personal solid, if you will.

Don't hype this transition up too much outside the meeting. It gets people nervous. We really prefer an actions-speak-louder-than-words way of doing things. Just get involved in the projects. There's no need to oversell the initiative...

'I Am' is not a fan of bragging. So, PLEASE - Don't 'Go Tell it on a Mountain'. That's really not necessary. A previous meeting did that and word spread over the hills and everywhere before our ground team was up and running. We appreciated the enthusiasm, but that was not helpful. If you're going to boast, make it about Christ Jesus. He apparently doesn't mind - you can go ahead and crown him with many crowns, or whatever.

Just keep this between us until like January 6th - that's only 12 days or so - and that will give us some time to pull a few things together and get folks in place.

We have some very wise people, big time strategists, coming from the East End that day - they are super gifted and they will get you up to speed faster than the rainbow scouts crossed the Red Sea on dry land.

We're just real glad you came out tonight to hear the Good News about the Christ Child Initiative. The CCC (Christmas Conspiracy Collective) has never been in better hands. We're realists here. We know that no leader is a Savior, but we think Jesus just might buck that trend. He's the real deal. He's gonna lighten your work-load right away.

And we hope to see you on the 6th - for the consultant meeting with the East End wise-guys.

That's it from me, really. Oh, just a few insider, member-y things. Some of our 'collective traditions' that tonight's organizers hope you'll enjoy participating in:

We're going to do the secret handshake in a bit, which we call the "passing of the peace." We'll be taking up a collection for our work, which we call the "offertory." Kind of mysterious, but

it's for a good cause. And then the Lord God will join us as Host for a little reception at his table in celebration of Christ's arrival and take-over. That's going to be glorious! A real foretaste of what's to come. And we'll have some songs and other things, of course. We'll bring Mozart back out again. So, just enjoy the meeting. We don't want to disappoint anyone. There's a lot of good stuff going on.

And we are glad you're here. Did I mention that? It's the most wonderful time of the year. There are no judgments here. It's really all about the work. About bringing the founder's vision to fruition.

Oh, I almost forgot - Sarah Bareilles also sent a little note of encouragement for the transition. It just says, "Show me how big your brave is." I'm not sure - I guess she just wants to see what you can do!

So, let's get out there and change the world. If God is for us, who can be against us?! In the name of the Father, the Son and who could forget the Holy Spirit.