

**St. Thomas Medina**  
**The Rev. Alexander Breckinridge**  
**Church Year: B**  
**Date: 12/24/11**  
**Season: Christmas**  
**Passage: Luke 1:1-20**

I have a guilty pleasure to share with you. It's about a television show I watch regularly. Now mostly what interests me on television involves college basketball, particularly the North Carolina Tar Heels, or football, particularly the New Orleans Saints, or Masterpiece Theater, or any movie that involves Meryl Street or Emma Thompson. I'm not much on network television—with one big exception. I really like a show called "Glee."

Glee is about high school life. One reason I'm drawn to Glee is because I'm a former high school chaplain and teacher and know that every day in high school there's a new drama being played out that brings out the best and the worst in human beings, sometimes in the very same person on the very same day! It's a real life, for sure.

Now, Glee is set at McKinley High School in Lima, Ohio, and the premise is that the glee club is made up of a lot of kids who ought be considered "different." And being "different" in high school isn't necessarily a good thing. The kids in this glee club have all sorts of different body shapes, they come from different ethnic backgrounds and different economic backgrounds, they have different sexual orientations and different academic

orientation. Some are smart and some aren't so smart. But what they all have in common is that they love to sing and love to perform. "Let's put on a show," in the best tradition of Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney might be their motto. Another thing they have in common is that most of them are considered to be losers by the popular kids and by their arch nemesis, "Sue," who's the coach of the cheerleaders and the Assistant Principal. The glee club is what I imagine the kingdom of heaven looks like. Full of all sorts and conditions of folks, as the old prayer puts it, including folks who I'll be surprised to see—and who undoubtedly will be just as surprised to see me!

So I want to tell you about Glee's Christmas special that was on a couple of weeks ago. Maybe you've seen it. If you haven't, I commend it to you. Here's the premise. The local PBS station has come to the Glee Club and invited them to produce a Christmas special. Great news! Only one problem, and that is that the budget for the show is only \$800. Not to worry says the intrepid student director, a boy named Artie, who also happened to be a paraplegic in a wheelchair. We'll shoot it in black and white just like in the '50s.

It turns out that in order to make this TV special, the Glee Club has to back out on a promise to work in a homeless shelter's food kitchen on Christmas Eve, but never mind. There's a show to put on! Cut to rehearsals

with the kids excitedly discussing which Christmas songs—all of them very secular, mind you—they'll sing. And then it's decided that the show will end with Rory, an exchange student from Ireland who can't go home for Christmas, reading Frosty the Snowman, although someone remarks that Frosty is such a sad story because Frosty melts in the end.

The next day – Christmas Eve—the show goes on. It's set in the swanky 50's bachelor pad of Curt and Blaine, two members of the club. Think Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin and you have the picture. And as new groups of guests arrive, each group performs a song and a dance, and it's all very jolly and, once again, all very secular. Finally, as the show is drawing to a close, in comes Rory, and the jolly cast all settle down next to the fireplace to hear Rory read Frosty the Snowman. And this is what Rory says: “In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Then an angel of the Lord shown around them, and they were afraid. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid—for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior...”

What a surprise! The cast is clearly moved by Rory's evocation of the true meaning of Christmas. Cut to the next scene. The whole cast walks into the homeless shelter on Christmas Eve bringing lots of food—there had been

fear that the shelter wouldn't have enough food to feed the crowds—they're singing, of course, and they begin to serve the hungry folks gathered for a meal. Is this corny? Sure. Is this sentimental? Sure. It's also very sweet and invites a couple of observations.

First, in a time when the crass materialism for our culture threatens to drown us all in a sea of dreck, how refreshing to see such an avowedly secular network television show unashamedly use part of Luke's story of Jesus' birth to point beyond the dreck to the deep meaning of the Christmas event. With the birth of Jesus—the incarnation—all boundaries between heaven and earth are shattered—the distance between the divine and the human is closed—fear is sent packing. And who is the first to hear this good news in this modern retelling? A bunch of high school losers. The ones who are different. The ones who aren't popular. Just like the first ones to hear the story—the shepherds. In Jesus' time, shepherds weren't cute. They were considered to be low and shiftless—outcasts and drifters—they definitely weren't part of the popular crowd. Yet they're the first to see, the first to hear, the first to tell. This seems to be God's way of doing business as St. Paul reminds us in his first letter to the Christians in Corinth.

“Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and

despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are. (1 Cor. 1:26-28)”

This theme is reflected over and over in Luke’s story of Christmas. In the call of Mary, the humble poor girl, the outsider, to be the mother of God; in the humble circumstances of Jesus’ birth—lying in an animal’s feed trough because all the accommodations for human beings were full, in the calling of the unpopular shepherds to see and tell. “God chooses what is low and despised in the world, things that are not to reduce to nothing things that are.”

What if we’re really being told something about the Kingdom of Heaven here? What if this gives you a clue into the nature of God? What if this is telling us that the truth of the gospel might be found in the lives of the ones who our culture doesn’t value as strong or powerful or deserving? What if the truth of the gospel might be found in the lives of the ones whom our culture calls losers? Maybe our corny, sentimental story about a group of high school losers who hear and tell might remind us that we can look for the new born Savior in a homeless shelter, or in a migrant worker encampment in Skagit Valley? The Savior of the World becomes human in a most ordinary way.

The second observation to make about our corny, sentimental story is that it nicely illustrates the point that tonight’s reading from the Letter to

Titus wants to make. We're reminded that in this present moment, we live in in-between times. In Christ, the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all. That's what Rory reminded his fellow losers as he read the gospel story. And we wait with hope for the manifestation of Christ's glory that is yet to come. And so what do we do in the meantime? Like right now. Well, maybe like the glee club, after we see and hear we go feed somebody who's hungry. After one sees and hears, maybe we go and spend some time with someone who's lonely. After we see and hear, maybe we stand up for someone or some group who the culture wants to throw out. Maybe we renounce worldly passions, like having to acquire more and more and more. Maybe we renounce worldly passions like having to prove that we are right all the time or that folks we might disagree with politically or philosophically are not only wrong but dangerously evil. That's a passion that's really strong in our world these days. The anxious need to be right, to be justified is so unnecessary if we know ourselves to be living in the grace of Christ's first coming and awaiting with expectant hope for his second. Christmas Eve is the time to remember that God has already given us the gift of grace in Christ Jesus. It's now up to us to allow the gifts of grace to transform us and then to respond with grateful hearts. The losers in the glee club get this in a way that the popular kids don't.

How we live our lives each day is a reflection of how we really understand this story of Christmas. We turn away from things that don't—last—popularity, success, being “right”—and embrace things that are eternal—compassion for the suffering, love for the lonely—Christ. If we open our hearts so that Christ can be born in us; as we become Christ's hands and Christ's feet in the world—all of life becomes sacred. We do good not too earn heavenly brownie points. We do good because God is good. The purpose of our whole life's journey is to reflect God's goodness and God's grace to the world. It's not enough just to hear this beautiful music tonight or to feel this wonderful story God is calling us right now—tonight—to be transformed by grace. On this night may we allow God's good gift of Jesus to flow from our hearts and our lives.

“We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings feel. O come to us, abide with us. Our Lord Emanuel.” Amen