

Bishop Gene's 2024 Epiphany Eve Address

"I can't believe it is the 42nd year that we have been doing this. I think the first time I was ten years old. But this is something we all look forward to throughout the year – to come together as a community and as a family.

"And as most of you know, and some of you may not know, in our Community, in our Church Community, we celebrate Christmas from the twenty-fifth of December through the sixth of January. And this is kind of bewildering to a lot of people in the modern era, because most people want to be done with Christmas. But the modern interpretation of Christmas is actually recent in history.

"Most people in this country don't realize that the actual date of Christmas was the sixth of January. And the reason for that was that in ancient Jerusalem the birth of Christ, the birth of Jesus Christ as Christ, was celebrated on the sixth of January signified by the baptism in the Jordan by John, and that was considered the true birth of Jesus – not the physical birth, but the spiritual birth. And that is what we celebrate in this Community.

"Now a lot of people say this is the 'Day of the Three Kings.' And in the Western church, which is the Roman church, that is what they teach. That is their interpretation. But we do not celebrate the Day of the Three Kings. We do not celebrate this. We celebrate the day of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan by John, when in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus humbles himself before John.

"This is allegorical, but it is very important; and it is said that the heavens opened and a voice from on high proclaimed, 'This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.'

"Now if you read your Bible today, it does not include the words: 'On this day I have begotten thee.' If you read the ancient scriptures and the ancient texts, the line 'On this day I have begotten thee' exists. And so that is why we gather here. It is for the simple reason that, although we do celebrate the birth of the man Jesus on the 25th of December (knowing that he was not born on the 25th of December), more importantly we celebrate the spiritual birth of Jesus, which is something we all aspire to and can attain.

"We know this history. This is the Roman history. But we do celebrate the fact that this holy person was born and came into our world. So we do acknowledge the 25th as that. And we won't get into the big history, but there was a controversy between the Eastern churches and the Western church, and finally they made a pact: 'You guys celebrate the 25th, and we'll celebrate the sixth.' And thus we have the origin of the Twelve Days of Christmas.

"So anyway, besides all of that, we come here for family, for community – something that is very important and very powerful – but also understanding the spiritual birth. We are all here as physical beings. But we all seek the spiritual birth that is embodied in that baptism at the Jordan. We can also talk about the Buddhists that celebrate two days for Siddhartha – the day of his physical birth, and then the day the Buddha experienced enlightenment. So this is not a new concept in religion, except that, unfortunately, in this country we have lost sight of that. This is why we are gathered here this evening because tomorrow is our Christmas.

"Now, we have a very special ritual that we do when we gather here every Epiphany Eve, and that is lighting of the Candles of Remembrance, which for the first time, we have asked be put in the foyer.

We changed the setup in this room, so there is no longer room for the candles here. The idea is that we are going to ask each of you to remember someone who has passed on – someone you loved and still love. We will start with this table here to my left and file table by table. The concept being we are lighting the candles for someone we love, someone that has gone out of the world into the Light. And we will remember these people for quite some time.

“So after we light the candles, we will return to our place setting, and then we will sing grace; and then the kitchen will let us know when all of the food is prepared in the dining room for all of us to go and enjoy. So that is the format for this evening. We do expect that Santa may appear. I don’t know.

“But I do need to thank the kitchen staff, which is Amanda, Noriko, and Radheka. Am I missing anybody? I also want to thank, for the first time, all of the men that helped move the furniture out of this room so that we can have this setup. And that’s Bob ... I don’t know who else is here ... Mike, Stephan, Pete, Larry. I want to thank them because tomorrow morning they have to bring everything back.

“One last thing that I want to mention is that, I think most of you know that we have put on a new roof at the hot springs at Steamboat. That is something of great service to the public. Most of you may know that property was gifted to us many, many decades ago under a proviso that we provide health and healing services to the public.

“Of course, after last year’s major winter, we could not sustain not doing anything about the roof which was greatly dilapidated, so we went ahead and put a new roof on the main building of the hot springs. And so that’s a great thing that we’ve done.

“Also, I don’t know how many of you have seen the work at the building next door that we call the East Wing. We are doing major renovations on the exterior of the building that have been long overdue, and what I want to bring across is that the hot springs operates as what we call a guild within our Church, and so it is a commercial operation that operates under the auspices of the Church, and we are able to do what we have done at Steamboat because of that.

“The other thing I want to mention is that among the various guilds, we have another major guild, which is the Two Feathers Guild, and that is operated by Reverends Robert and Noriko Roy. So that guild is the guild that is funding the improvements at the East Wing. My point is that as the Church expands and the Church grows, our ministers can operate these guilds. I’ve talked to our people at the Sanctuary. We should have some guilds at the Sanctuary. Because if we have these guilds that can be activated, we can actually make some interesting things happen.

“But that is all business. We are not here for business, but I am very proud of the fact of what we have been able to do at Steamboat and very proud of the fact of what we have done at the East Wing. We should be done in the next two months or so. Oh, and I should also mention we have made additional improvements at the Cathedral Church of the Americas at the Sanctuary, which I will show you all tomorrow.

“Anyway, I thank you all for being here. You are always welcome in this house. And now we will start with the Candles of Remembrance, and please afterwards take your seats, and then we will have the Grace. Thank you.”