

Jumping for Joy

Advent 4 Year C – Luke 1:39-56

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, Dec 23, 2012

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

This week, one of my Internet correspondents called my attention to that old nursery rhyme, “Jack be nimble. Jack be quick. Jack jump over the candle stick.”

Now, I don't know about you, maybe it's just the way my admittedly somewhat twisted imagination works, but I have always, I mean from the time I was *five*, I have wondered why in the world this Jack, or anyone *else* for that matter, would bother jumping over a candlestick. I actually tried it once when I was, oh, maybe nine or ten. When my folks were not around to keep me from playing with matches – a profound no-no in the Martindale household, I assure you – I lit one of the candles that were kept on Mom's china cupboard, I set it on the floor of the kitchen – the dining room was carpeted in that avocado sculptured-shag I wrote about in the *Good News*, and *anyone* knows you don't go setting candles down on sculptured-shag carpeting – and I jumped over it... *several* times. But I just didn't *get* it. I mean, what was it that made Jack jump?

Come on, don't pretend you don't know it. Say it with me, “Jack be nimble. Jack be quick. Jack jump over the candle stick.”

Maybe this Jack fella' jumped because he was frightened into it. People do that, you know, when they're suddenly scared, people jump sometimes. Maybe Jack was standing there, admiring the soft glow of the candle, and maybe someone sneaked up behind him very quietly, and maybe they leaned in... and screamed, “Arrrgghh!” That would do it for me. I guess anyone would jump over the candlestick given *that* set of circumstances. Maybe Jack jumped because he was *scared*.

Or maybe Jack was standing there talking to his cousin, Jill, let's say. Maybe they were standing around, maybe at some sort of cocktail party – if Jack was maybe an Episcopalian – maybe Jack and Jill were just standing there minding their own business, you know, kind of the in the vicinity of the candlestick, when a whole bunch of people came pouring into the room. Suppose one of the people tripped on the leg of the coffee table and jostled into Jack so hard that he was knocked off his balance, and maybe he just lurched forward toward the candle stick. So instead of landing on the candlestick and maybe suffering an embarrassing and painful burn, Jack would have no *choice* but to jump over it. Maybe Jack jumped because he was *pushed*.

Or maybe someone dared him to jump. “Hey, Jack,” maybe someone said, “I dare you to jump over that candlestick over there – I double-*dog* dare to jump over that candlestick.” Maybe they were even really, really persistent about it. “Hey Jack,” maybe they said, “I'll give you fifty *bucks* if you can jump over that candlestick.” Maybe Jack just decided to accept the wager, and show everyone what he was made of. Maybe Jack jumped for the money.

Or maybe Jack received a letter from a dear friend. Maybe he opened it up and began to *read* his letter. Maybe the letter contained such good news that Jack started whooping and hollering, and jumping up in the air, and dancing all around the room. Maybe he was so happy with his good news that, in a moment of absolute excitement and exultation, Jack jumped right over the candlestick. Maybe, just maybe, Jack jumped for joy.

In this morning's Gospel lesson we hear the beautiful story of Mary and Elizabeth and Jesus and another Jack. Well, we don't usually go in for using that particular nickname, preferring instead to hail him more formally as John, well, “John the Baptist” from the *rest* of his story. In this morning's bit of the story, though, our friend Jack definitely has *not* yet taken up the camel-skin wearing, locust-eating ways for which he later becomes famous. In point of fact, in this morning's story Jack is still safely tucked

away in his mother Elizabeth's belly. When the newly expectant Mary shouted howdy to her equally pregnant cousin, Jack – er... John – did some jumping.

Now what would cause such a reaction. Maybe like that other Jack, our pre-natal John jumped because he was frightened. He was, after all, encountering the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ. That would have the potential to spook just about *anyone*. Maybe itty-bitty John jumped because he was pushed, though in his situation it is usually the baby who does the pushing. I suppose he could have jumped for money, but what would a baby want with cash *in utero*? So why did nimble and quick little Jack jump. We could guess, but we don't *have* to, because Luke goes on to quote his mamma Elizabeth herself as she practically *sang*, "as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, Mary, the child in my womb leaped for *joy*."

In just a little more than a day, we'll each of us be taking a leap. After weeks of preparation, albeit a bit foreshortened by the accident of the calendar this year, we will be jumping from the season of Advent straight into Christmas itself. From the oldest to the youngest, from the slowest to the quickest, from the most nimble to the... not-so-much, figuratively we will jump (please don't try it literally) we will jump figuratively over *this* candlestick into the season of the Incarnation.

But how do we make that leap? Is it out of fear? For some of us, the thought of our responsibility in the face of the second coming of Christ, makes us anxious to jump into the cozy celebration of the Babe of Bethlehem. For some of us, the coziness of the hay-filled manger and the glow of adoring shepherds is infinitely preferable to the work we face in preparing for the coming of the King of Glory.

Maybe we jump from Advent to Christmas because we have been pushed. I've already told you a couple of times that I have personally felt the shove toward Christmas since the day after Halloween when they put up the snowflakes on the downtown lampposts. From the greenery and the twinkling lights, to the nearly constant carols and TV specials, and the incessant reference to the twelve days of this or that, we are nudged, jostled, even *propelled* toward Christmas at an alarmingly accelerating rate.

Or maybe it's the *money*. I'm quite positive that that is the reason for the full court press down at Wal-Mart – or any other store in town, for that matter. We have gotten so caught up in the getting and the giving, in the knowing how much to spend and the knowing when to call it enough, that it is all too tempting to make the jump into Christmas out of pure, unadulterated greed.

Make no mistake, scared, shoved or bribed into it, before thirty-six hours have passed, we will *all* jump on into Christmas. But my hope for us this morning, my *prayer* for us this morning, is that we will make the jump for a *different* reason. This season I pray that for each of us, our leap into Christmas will be one of absolute *gladness*. I pray that the blessedness of Christ's coming, the pure brightness of his presence with us, the utter delight of his coming again and afresh into our lives, will be to us such a *glory* that we *cannot* sit still with the excitement. I pray that like John, when we hear again the incredible, improbable proclamation that the Eternal Word of God has come among *us*, we will have no *choice* but to *leap* for joy!

Jack be nimble. Jack be quick. Isn't that an absolutely *wonderful* candlestick?