

Readings

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

Luke 1-2 (portions of)

John 1:1-14

Christmas Never Ends

According to the gospel of Luke and tradition tonight we celebrate a brief story of a babe born in a stable because there was no room in the inn. According to the reading of the scriptures this is the night when Angels are singing, and shepherds are following a star. Soon the Wise ones too will soon be on a journey to see the babe.

At this time of winter solstice we celebrate a story of light in the darkness. We hear the words of prophets and we are assured time and time again that there is no purpose in being afraid.

We have added a lot of other things to this celebration and story. Trees, and gifts, Santa and reindeers and those things are not all bad. They add joy to the occasion and give us opportunities to show love and share life together.

But as we sing and rejoice and have our warm feelings, we are called to take notice of the fear and darkness around us. This is a story that is told and remembered because of the lives it has changed.

This story that we make a gentle, joyful story was not simple at all. If things were so simple in those days we wouldn't here the words of the prophets and angels.

They wouldn't need speak the words "the people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light" or "be not afraid." They wouldn't have needed a prince of peace.

And although some people wonder if the angels were real and if the shepherds and wise men really followed a star. People ask me all the time was Mary a virgin that God had chosen, or is there more we haven't been told? If you want you can find theories and questions and wonders that would explain all the miracles away. But for me whether myth or fact the story is true for it speaks to the needs of this world every day. For it appears The universe shifted the moment Jesus was born. Jesus revealed God's presence in and with us. And today we are faced with the task of living that revolutionary love, here and now, in the time and place we belong to.

Christmas present should look different and better than Christmas past.

This is a story of ordinary and extraordinary, poor and rich, chosen and outcast all meshed into a transforming event in our world. This is a story where love breaks in and changes the way people live.

I hate to say it but sometimes I think we have lightened this story in such a way that it hardly seems there's a point. The stable is pretty and golden with light and the babe and mom gently rest on the hay. But what of the atmosphere of the stable and the whole birthing process - rarely are either of these simple pretty and gentle. Birthing a child in a stable would be uncomfortable, cold, smelly, painful, unsanitary, messy, and anything but ideal.

But from what I have come to know about God this isn't out of character. God has a habit of showing up in unexpected places in unrealistic ways. John tells us that when Jesus was born "What came into being in him was life and the life was the light of all people the light shone in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

God is the creator of transformation who longs to speak into the places that need to change. Jesus was called the light of the world, the prince of peace, deliverer, the true light full of Grace and glory.

What is Christmas about? What is this birth about?

This day is about an ordinary, extraordinary event that took place long ago that if we hold onto the truth of today it will change our lives.

Ann Weems wrote:

"It was an ordinary event;
after all women give birth every day.
The baby cries; the woman puts the child to breast and the world goes on.
God did not pitch a tent among us in an extraordinary way.

Jesus arrived as all of us do, powerless and dependent, a baby.
What ordinary means for the Son of God!
No royal robes, no crown, nor was there priestly garb at all
just a naked baby born to dwell among us

And yet, in that ordinary place, holy was the night,
for holy were the hearts of those who heard the word of God in the ordinary
birth cry of a child."¹

I don't believe God's way of being alive in our world has changed all that much. God still shows up in ordinary ways to shine the light in the dark. Babies are still miracles of hope, peace, joy and love. But the difference is in our story today all creation stopped and took note of the extraordinary born on that night.

¹ Weems, Ann "Searching for Shalom" pg. 83

What if when we heard our saints and angels say “Be not afraid” we listened and learned. What if we walked this earth with the presence of peace and joy in our hearts. What if we birthed God’s light and life in our world in a way that others could see.

What if as we sang “Joy to the World” we took the words to heart? What if our hearts prepared him room. What if amid the shopping, eating and parties we prepared our hearts for God to enter. What if we allowed this story to change our lives like it changed the lives of many long ago? The story of Jesus’ birth is the story of the one who is always being born in our hearts and desires to always be with us.

What if we allowed the story of Jesus to give us new life this day. What if we believed that this extraordinary Jesus gave us tools to live our ordinary lives. I believe Christmas comes every time we believe in hope over despair, in joy over sadness, in peace over anxiety and warring, and in love over hatred.

This isn’t a gentle story this is a story of God breaking into the darkest of nights in the lowliest of places shattering the way the world was.

Christmas doesn’t end tomorrow. Christmas doesn’t end with Epiphany, or Lent, or Easter; Christmas is God’s continuing gift of presence with us, and our challenge to prepare room in our hearts, and lives.

So in the next weeks as we pack up our ornaments for another year and fill the storage room with boxes labeled “Christmas,” think about how your life can continue the work of Christmas. And as you pull the tinsel off the tree and put away Frosty, imagine who is lost today. Reflect on who is hungry and needs peace all year long. And in the months to come when the shepherds and angels have long been back in the box, remember their surprise and joy, and find a way to offer their songs even if it’s the month of June.

Howard Thurman puts it this way in his poem

“The Work of Christmas”:

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.

Christmas day is the day when we celebrate the birth of new life. For born this day is the true light which enlightens everyone. Jesus came into this world to fill it with grace and glory. This is the day where we in the world hope to align with the Holy of Holies and bring peace, joy and love to all creation.

Will we allow the light of life to be born this day - will we follow the star and shout to the lowly I bring you good news of great joy? Let us live out the peace on earth we are called to as we hold onto the truth born this night.

Love comes healing, God revealing Friends be joyful and believe

For Christ is born this Day!

Amen.