

A Christmas Eve Reflection  
Luke 2.1-20  
December 24, 2015  
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I'm the first to admit that I love the cultural trappings of Christmas in the United States. I love Bing Crosby and egg nog and twinkle lights and Hershey's Kisses in green, red, and silver wrappers. I will watch almost any Christmas movie ever made in which Christmas is almost ruined before a tiny group of Santa-believers helps make sure the presents head down the chimney even if the big man can't. I love the stories for the cozy feelings they conjure in my home and the lightness they foster in my spirit.

That seems like quite enough on its own, yet here we are. The sun is setting around us on this warm, humid Christmas Eve. There are parties, celebrations, and traditions waiting for us in the evening and day ahead, but we have chosen to stop everything and hold this sacred space together for a little while. We need to be near one another. We need to sing, "Joyful and triumphant." We need to hear the story again.

If ever there's a year when we need the Jesus story, surely it is this year.

This story we tell—while the lights are low and children are whispering with excitement—it is that God enters our world when we least expect. God enters our lives when we say "yes" to the Divine Source. God enters our time like light shining in darkness, and then God invites us into that light.

In a year of great losses of friends, loved ones, family...

In a year of national and international terror...

In a year of watching millions flee their homes to save their children and themselves...

In a year of political candidates telling us to be afraid and trust no one except them...

In a year of transition, taking chances, trying something new...

It is the story of God moving in the world through a pregnant, unmarried, wandering, young woman that speaks to our great hope and deep fear. It is the scene of dirty, untrustworthy, disregarded shepherds wandering far from the center of town, the

center of community, the center of accepted tradition suddenly hearing an angel and finding themselves well in the center of God's presence that invites us to believe the same is possible for us. "Do not be afraid," the angel cries out. And we hold onto that command.

"Do not be afraid," in the face of loss and grief and change and unknown and new, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people."

That word is worth carving out an hour of a special day in a busy season in our crowded lives to sit and be still for just a little while.

In fact, Frederick Buechner writes, "I think that is much of what the Christian faith is. It is for a moment, just for a little while, seeing the face [from the ancient story] and being still, that is all. There is so much about the whole religious enterprise that seems [old-fashioned] and irrelevant and as out of place in our age as an antique statue is out of place in the sky. But just for the moment itself, say, of Christmas, there can be only silence as something comes to life, some spirit, some hope; as something is born again into the world that is so strange and new and precious that not even a cynic can laugh although he might be tempted to weep."

The shepherds released their fear and paid attention to what they were experiencing. They didn't laugh, didn't weep; they ran. With haste, they ran to find this baby, this Christ-child, and everyone was amazed. And Mary took the words of the shepherds into her heart just as she had taken the Christ child into her womb. With amazement, they held that space and they pondered the meaning of it all. Then \*snap\*, just like that, the shepherds returned to their old lives but not their old selves. They returned fully awake for they had walked into the presence of the Divine, into the presence of Christ, and they were transformed forever.

My brothers and sisters, do not be afraid.

For just a moment, for just a little while, hear this ancient story and be still within it. If God enters time and space when the night is dark and nothing seems less likely, then surely God waits to be known by us right now.

People are gathered in places of worship tonight across this city, across this country, just as we are. Like us, they are waiting for the birth of the Christ. Throughout the night, we will hear the angels say, "Do not fear! I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people!" We will remind each other of our truth, "The light shines in the

darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." Indeed, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined."

May this story be real to you tonight. May this birth take place again within your spirit. May the light of God pierce the darkness around you and within you. May your fear fall away as good news and deep gladness take over. May God be known to you in each breath. May you ponder these things in your heart and return home amazed by all you have seen and heard. And may the peace of Christ be with you.

Amen.