

Christmas Eve Meditation

Luke 2:1-14

John 1:1-14

Two little boys had a crush on the same little girl. When the girl was cast as Mary in the Christmas pageant, both of them wanted very much to be Joseph. But there is only one Joseph in the play, and one of the boys got the part. The other was cast as the innkeeper.

We all know the story well. Joseph and Mary come to the innkeeper for a room, but he tells them there is no room at the inn, you'll have to go round back to the stable. But not in this pageant. The innkeeper, still smarting over not getting the Joseph role, speaks up and says, "Sure, come on in, you can have the best room in the house!"

Everyone gasped. The pageant seemed to be ruined. Mary must have her baby in the stable. After a moment of stunned silence, Joseph spoke up. He said, "Come on Mary, I wouldn't let you stay in that dump. Let's go around back to the stable!" The pageant continued as it was written.

Tonight the long, long wait is over. At least it seem like a long wait when you are a child.

It is hard to wait for Christmas. Maybe that's why we've been having Christmas for the past three months. Since before Halloween, stores began to put up their Christmas decorations and began their Christmas sales. Some of us say, "Wait, can't I have another week?" Then again, we may have missed it. I've seen several displays of Valentine's Day merchandise in the stores this week.

As a child I remember how difficult it was to sleep on this night. It was the expectation, the anticipation that kept me wide awake until late in the evening or woke me before daylight on Christmas morning. Let's go see what Santa brought!

Actually, there were two days of the year that we anticipated more than any of the others. One was Christmas, and then right after Christmas we would look forward to opening day of the baseball season. Sometimes Opening Day would get rained out, actually in Buffalo, it often got snowed out, and that would be a big disappointment. (In case you're wondering, opening day for MLB is just 99 days away.) But I don't remember ever being disappointed by Christmas, no matter what the weather or other circumstances.

The story of the first Christmas is told by the Gospel writers, and each of them gives us a slightly different view of the birth of Jesus

Luke tells of a young mother, of angels and shepherds and a manger; only Matthew lets us in on a visit from the magi. Mark is silent about the whole thing; and the writer we know

as John seems almost formal and dull. He puts it this way: "*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth.*" Yet what he records may be the most important part of Christmas. It is John who talks about the Word that became human, the Word that became one of us.

But John is writing for the Greeks, and that means us, for our basic intellectual tools come from the Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The idea of a pre-existent "Word" was an intellectual linchpin for the Greeks. The "Word" was the creative power of the gods, the wisdom that generated all that there is. "In the beginning was the Word," John wrote, and the Greeks read it and said, "Right on!"

In Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the King, at a specific time and in a specific place, there was a birth. That birth is surrounded by a beautiful story. Tonight is alive with mystery. But the power is not in the sentiment, but in the event. "*The light shines in the darkness,*" and the world can never be the same. And if that light shines in your life you will not be the same.

God could have said, "Here is something that will save the world if you will only believe it." But that's not how God comes among us. God says, "Here is my Son, follow him."

God could have said, "Here is a sacred document. Accept whatever it says." But God didn't come to us as a book, but as flesh and blood, born in the city of David, in the days of Herod the king.

This manger child, this light of the world, is the world's most decisive baby. He can remake your life. You can have new life in him. You can be free from worry and anxiety and despair. You don't need to suffer from terror anymore. You don't need to be subject to the powers and principalities which can be so destructive to life. You can be whole; you can be redeemed, reconciled to God! That's the good news of great joy the angels told the shepherds about, out on the hills while they were keeping watch over their flocks.

The manger child will not only change your life, he can change the world. There is hope for peace, not because we are armed to the teeth and therefore consider ourselves strong and powerful, but even in spite of our arms and power. When his light shines out into our society people begin to treat one another with respect. Swords are turned into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. There will be justice and dignity for every person. The kingdom, of which this babe is sovereign, can take shape right in the midst of the kingdoms this world, which rattle their sabers, perpetuate injustices, and demean their own citizens. That's what the angels were talking about. And that is still the power of the gospel.

Our world will change when the miracle of Bethlehem, the light of the world, shines in our homes and our hearts, and in all the systems around which we organize our lives.

Tonight, on this holiest of nights, as we humbly bow before the manger, honoring the one heaven and earth adore; tonight when with the shepherds we hear angels singing; tonight when we stand in awe before the miracle which comes at the birth of any child; tonight we and our whole world moves a bit closer to salvation, to wholeness and peace. God has come to us in the only form that can help us - in a person, a child, a savior, who is Christ the Lord.

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