

Sermon
December 24th, 2022 Christmas Eve 10pm
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott
Readings: Readings: Is 9:2-7; Ps 96; Tit 2:11-14; Lk 2:1-20

I'd like you to close your eyes and imagine something with me. It's dark. You're outside. You're with a young mother. She takes her newborn baby, and she holds him out to you. The baby is tightly wrapped – swaddled. He can't reach out to you. He is tiny. Defenseless. Vulnerable. Will you hold out your arms, and take him? Will you hold him? Embrace him?

Christmas Eve. A night of wonder. We gather with candles, and music and beauty and drama as we retell the story of the birth of Jesus once again. Luke's gospel brings us a story with both angels and shepherds. A story that is both heavenly and earthly. A story with both splendor and vulnerability.

It's a story with contrast and paradox, yes. At its heart, though it is a love story, and it is a story of revolution. This is the night when God turned everything upside down. Tonight is the night when God moved from somewhere "out there"/"up there" into Mary's arms. Tonight is the night we come face to face with God, in Jesus. Jesus:

tiny, defenseless, vulnerable, waiting to be held, embraced and loved. Tonight is the night that God came to be with us, one of us. God comes to us in love, asking to be loved. Asking to be held and cherished and cared for as we would care for a newborn. Asking for us to care for each other, and for our world, the same way.

I'd like to share a poem with you:

He did not wait till the world was ready,
till men and nations were at peace.
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,
and prisoners cried out for release.
He did not wait for the perfect time.
He came when the need was deep and great.
He dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine.
He did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy he came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame
he came, and his Light would not go out.
He came to a world which did not mesh,
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh
the Maker of the stars was born.
We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,

for to share our grief, to touch our pain,
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

This is the poem “First Coming” by Madeleine L’Engle. Christmas doesn’t erase sorrow and grief and pain. It infuses those things with hope, and that hope lies in God having come to be with us, in Jesus.

If we look to Jesus as a “problem solver” we might find ourselves wondering how so little has changed since that night 2000+ years ago. Luke’s gospel tells us of Jesus’s birth against a backdrop of Roman power and domination. We live in a world where power and domination and oppression seem stronger than ever. God didn’t come to us in Jesus to solve that **for** us. He came to solve it **with** us. God comes to us in Jesus as love – endless, limitless love – embodied. To dwell among us to show us that it is possible to live with love, and compassion, and justice and peace.

God didn’t wait until we were ready, for the perfect time, or for pure hearts. God came into our messy, complicated world to be with us in the midst of the messiness. In the midst of the complications – in the midst of the tangles we make. In the midst of both sorrow and joy.

This is the hope in Christmas. God is with us.

God is asking for our hearts, asking for us to let down our defenses by coming to us as a defenseless baby. Are we willing to receive God's love? Are we willing to reach out and take hold of it, cradling it, holding it as we would a baby? Are we willing to hold all people – all of creation – with that same love and care? I pray that this Christmas, we will all reach out to Mary, receiving the gift of God's endless, limitless love in Jesus. May we know in our hearts that God is with us in all things. And, may we, in that knowledge, let down our defenses, and live the lives of love, care, compassion, justice and peace that are possible with God. In Jesus name. Amen.