

Sermon
December 24th, 2025
Christmas Eve
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott
Readings: Is 9:2-7; Ps 96; Tit 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

Close your eyes. Imagine Mary and Joseph, in the darkness of that night of Jesus's birth. Feel that darkness.

We gather here this Christmas Eve — a blessed night — with candles and music, beauty and drama. And we began in the dark. Because this is where God comes to us.

In the dark. In the womb. In the night. In our dreaming.

God does not come to erase the darkness, but to be with us in it. In *all* the darkness — whether hopeful or hideous — God is with us.

Imagine Jesus, in that darkness. A tiny baby. Swaddled. Vulnerable. Defenseless. Needing to be held. Needing love and care. This is how God comes to us. Not in strength, but in vulnerability. Not demanding power, but asking to be loved.

Luke's Gospel gives us a story that holds heaven and earth together. Angels and shepherds. Glory and ordinariness. Splendour and vulnerability. It is a story full of contrast and paradox — and at its heart, it is a love story. And it is also a story of revolution — because this is the night God turns everything upside down.

Jesus is born at a particular time, in a particular place, under Roman occupation. A census is ordered. People are registered. Counted. Controlled. Empire decides who matters and who does not.

And yet the child at the center of the story does not count — at least not by the standards of power. Jesus is born unregistered. No palace. No protection. No recognition.

God does not enter the world through systems that dominate and exclude. God enters the world as a baby laid in a feeding trough — unnoticed, unprotected, disposable by the world's standards.

And the first people to hear the news are shepherds — people who also didn't count much. People considered unreliable. Unclean. Expendable. People whose lives are shaped by danger, boredom, and being overlooked.

They are the ones awake in the dark. They are the ones watching and waiting. They are the ones God trusts with good news. For just a moment, they catch a glimpse of their worth.

That matters — deeply. To be seen. To be trusted. To know that your life counts when the world keeps telling you it doesn't.

And this is not just ancient history. Here in Ottawa, on a night like this, there are people trying to stay warm. There are families carrying quiet worries about

money, housing, or health. There are newcomers finding their way in a new country. There are people longing to feel at home — in this city, in this season, in their own lives.

Some of these stories are close to us. Some are easy to overlook. But Christmas reminds us that God notices them all.

Because Christmas tells us something both gentle and challenging: God shows up among those who feel unseen. God draws close to those who are tired, or anxious, or uncertain. God chooses presence — simple, faithful presence — over power or perfection.

What if that is the invitation of this night? Not that we fix everything. Not that we carry the weight of the world on our own shoulders. But that we notice. That we care. That we stay open to one another — especially when it would be easier to turn away.

John's Gospel tells the same truth in different words:

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

All the mystery of God moves into human arms. God becomes touchable.

Holdable. Vulnerable. God chooses flesh. God's will is always incarnation.

As theologian and author Richard Rohr says: Matter matters. Bodies matter.

This world matters.

God does not save us from a distance. God does not fix the world *for* us. God comes to be *with* us. With us in fear. With us in grief. With us in a world that is beautiful and broken at the same time.

Christmas does not deny the reality of suffering. It tells the truth about it — and then insists that love is stronger - that love is stronger than anything.

As author and poet Madeleine L'Engle reminds us, God did not wait for the world to be ready. God came when the need was deep and great. God came into a world like ours — tangled, unfinished — and the light did not go out.

And still, the light comes.

In her poem “Blessing for the Longest Night”, poet Jan Richardson tells us that “the light has a fondness for the body.” The light has a fondness for flesh. For shining through eye and hand and heart. That is what we see in Jesus. The light of God’s love shining through human eyes. Reaching out through human hands. Breaking open human hearts.

And tonight, that story begins — not with force, but with vulnerability.

God comes to us not as a solution imposed from above, but as love embodied among us. God comes not to dominate, but to dwell. Not to conquer, but to accompany. Which means that Christmas asks something of us.

If God chooses *with* instead of *for*, then we are invited to do the same — to stay present, to remain soft in a hard world, to put flesh around love in our choices, our kindness, our care for one another.

We began this night in the dark. And this is still where God comes to us.

In our darkness. In our longing. In our unfinished world.

So tonight, may you feel the light in this place. May song and silence, prayer and sacrament kindle it in the darkness. May we open ourselves — again and again — to the blessed light that comes.

And may that light fill our hearts, shine from our eyes, and flow from our hands — into this city, into this world, into all the places still longing for peace. God is with us. In Jesus. May we know that, in our hearts and souls and minds, and may we live it in our lives, in Jesus name. Amen.