

Sermon

First Sunday After Christmas

Sunday, December 28th, 2025

Church of the Ascension, Ottawa

The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: [ISAIAH 63:7-9](#); [PSALM 148](#); [HEBREWS 2:10-18](#); [MATTHEW 2:13-23](#)

Christmas is not over.

The candles are still burning. The carols still echo in this place. The light has come — and we have been reminded once again that God is with us.

Today, though, the lectionary refuses to let us stay at the manger.

We are given a story that moves us forward quickly — out of the stable and into danger. Out of tenderness and into fear. Out of holy night and into a world that resists the light.

An angel appears to Joseph in a dream: *“Get up. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt.”* Mary, Joseph and Jesus become refugees.

The arc of the season sharpens. From waiting, to birth, to exile, the gospel tells one story: God is with us—choosing presence, sharing our vulnerability, and trusting us to carry love into the world.

That last part matters - because God does not come into the world only to be admired, or believed in from a distance. God comes to involve us. God comes needing something.

The Incarnation - Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us - tells us that God's love does not remain abstract. It takes flesh. And once love takes flesh, it becomes dependent — on shelter, on care, on protection, on human faithfulness.

Jesus needs Mary and Joseph to say yes. Jesus needs Joseph to wake up in the night and move. Jesus needs human courage to carry divine love through danger.

This is how God chooses to work.

Our reading from Hebrews this morning puts it plainly:

*“Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.”*

Jesus does not save us from outside our lives. He saves us from *within* them. He shares our fear, our displacement, our vulnerability — so that no part of being human is untouched by God.

And, Matthew’s Gospel does not spare us the cost.

We hear that Herod responds to fear with violence. Innocent children are killed. Mothers grieve. Rachel weeps and refuses to be comforted. This, too, is part of the Christmas story.

Not because God wills it — but because God enters a world where fear still breeds cruelty, and power still protects itself at the expense of the vulnerable. And God does not turn away.

Isaiah gives us language strong enough to hold this truth:

*“In all their distress, God was distressed too.”*

God is not watching from afar. God is moved. God is affected. God is involved. And that involvement now extends to us.

Just as Jesus once said to John’s disciples, “*Go and tell what you see,*” the Incarnation continues through human witnesses. Through people who notice where love is breaking in. Through people who choose to participate rather than to wait for rescue.

Jesus does not grow up untouched by this truth. He grows up having been carried through danger. Having depended on others. Having survived because love acted quickly and faithfully in the night.

And that shapes everything. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus is not ashamed to call us siblings. This means the work of God in the world is shared work.

Jesus needs us. Not because God is incomplete — but because love, once embodied, must be carried.

Jesus needs us to notice where people are afraid. To shelter what is vulnerable. To tell the truth about suffering without letting it have the last word. To carry the light into places we would rather not go.

Psalm 148 calls all creation to praise — not because everything is resolved, but because God has chosen not to abandon the world.

Praise, here, is not denial. It is not forced cheerfulness. It is resistance. It is trust that presence matters. Christmas does not promise safety. It promises ‘with-ness’.

It promises that God goes with us — into exile, into grief, into uncertainty — and asks us to go with one another in the same way.

So on this First Sunday after Christmas, we hold both truths together:

The light has come. And the world is still dangerous.

God is with us — still. And because God is with us, we are entrusted with something sacred. To carry love where it is costly. To choose courage instead of cruelty. To stay soft in a hard world. To participate — hand to hand, heart to heart — in the slow, particular coming of the kingdom.

God moved from cosmos to cradle, from cradle into exile, and now moves through us. May we notice. May we stay. May we carry the love that once needed arms to hold it — and still does. In Jesus’ name. Amen.