

Meditation for Christmas Eve

December 24, 2020

Christmas Eve

Luke 2:1-20

by *Eric Anderson*

I don't have a story to tell you tonight. Or, rather, I have already shared the story: the story of an unwanted journey, of no vacancies for travelers, of a birth in an uncomfortable place.

I have already shared the story of heavenly messengers wishing peace to the Earth, of a startling announcement to the only ones out on the hills in the night, of gruff men marveling over a newborn in a manger, of a mother who treasured all these things in her heart.

On this Christmas two thousand and twenty, may we treasure all these things in our hearts.

Many of the things we usually treasure are... hard to come by. We have had to forego the long trips to visit family scattered around the continent or the continents, or to welcome them into our homes after their long journeys. We have had to forego the frantic meal preparation, though I suspect that many of us will still eat and overeat tomorrow, yes? We have had to forego the Christmas caroling from house to house, and the wreath-making, and the parties, and the festive nights out. Shortly, we will forego the passing of candlelight from person to person, small flames combining into a warm glow to fill this sanctuary. We will light candles at home instead, and let's face it: it will not be the same.

It is different. And unwelcome. And it is not the same.

What is the same is the old words about a journey and a birth and a song and a wonder and a child in a manger.

I resist calling these unprecedented times, because there has been plenty of previous precedent in the world. Christians have endured periodic persecution – actual persecution, not a fictitious “war on Christmas” – and so did not observe Christmas at those times – in fairness, the first Christians hadn't begun celebrating Christmas at all. There have been wars that drove people from their homes or summoned them into the armies. In the first winter of World War I, the soldiers, without orders, called a “time out” for Christmas of 1914. It was still a different Christmas than any had known before, but at least it was a Christmas without artillery fire.

Christmas has coincided with more pandemics than I have even heard about. It has been held during storms and after earthquakes and fires. It has been held during economic crises. I would guess that for each of these generations, living through war or pandemic or disaster or depression, this new state of Christmas has felt unfamiliar, unwanted, and yes, unprecedented.

In all those times, the story remained. Today, that same story... that story remains.

It's simple and it's elegant in its simplicity. A journey. A displacement. A birth. An announcement. A song. A visit. A child. A mother who treasures these things in her heart.

In a very real sense, it matters what our Christmas experience is. It matters whether we can safely embrace one another or not. Right now, prolonged exposure to a potentially deadly virus is literally a matter of life and death, so yes: it matters. It matters whether we have a roof over our heads or the security of peace. It matters whether food is available and whether our working wage pays our bills. These things matter.

In another sense, they do not matter, because the story of that birth endures it all. That is the story of God embarking on a project of love that continues to astonish us. The Creator of the world entered Creation itself. The arranger of births was born. The power of the Universe emerged as weak as any human infant. The angels could sing of glory to God in the highest heaven because God had taken a manger for a bed.

A trip. A stable. A newborn. A revelation. A chorus. A gathering. An infant in a feeding trough. A mother treasuring these things in her heart.

Treasure these things in your hearts, friends. The Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One was born long ago, a literal manifestation of the mercy of God. The story remains and the story persists, because the mercy of God endures and the mercy of God expands.

In the infant of Bethlehem God so loved the world. In the infant of Bethlehem God loves the world still. In the infant of Bethlehem God always will love the world.

Amen.