

“Christmas Meditation”

Luke 2:1-20

This Christmas, I am thinking about gifts. Yes, I think about Jesus and how his birth is a gift from God. I am also thinking about the many gifts I have received over the years from family and friends.

- Some of them were wonderful and much desired, like the toys I received as a child from my generous and aims-to-please parents.
- Some were good, even if I didn't ask for them.
- Some gifts were not as welcome as others.
- And Some gifts, not many, left me, well, a little disappointed.

I'm sure many of us have had similar experiences in receiving gifts—the good, the fair, and the disappointing. And when faced with a gift that didn't make the grade, some wise parent or grandparent or friend would be there to remind us of that saying I'm sure we've all heard: “It's the thought that counts.” This has helped me come to realize that even though I might consider some gifts weren't what I was looking for, somebody stopped to take the time to think of me.

Tonight, we receive the most marvelous gift ever given: The gift of God's self, Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior. Tonight, we hear again the story of Jesus' birth. It's a story filled with familiar characters and locations:

- There's Mary and Joseph, the couple who set out on the road to Bethlehem to meet the imperial demand for a census issued by Caesar Augustus.
- There are shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem, city of the Shepherd-King David, watching over their flocks by night.
- There are angels, a multitude of them (ever wonder how many angels there are in a multitude?), come to announce the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, with these words:
- “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. And this will be a sign unto you: you will find the babe lying in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes.”
- There is amazement and joy as the shepherds race to Bethlehem and find the stable where they see for themselves what the angels announced.
- They return to their fields praising God.
- And Mary “ponders in her heart” all that has transpired that holy night.

This story makes us ponder too: What in the world (and in heaven) was God thinking when God sent Jesus to earth? People of faith have wondered the same thing for the past 2000 years. What is this mystery we call incarnation, God living among us, in human flesh? There have been lots of attempts over the centuries to explain what God was thinking:

- As Luke portrays him, Jesus is the Messiah, come to save God's people from themselves.
- For some early church leaders, Jesus was sent to teach us and to lead us in God's ways because, after all, we are a pretty dense lot, and we have a tendency to not do things God's way.

- Others said the coming of Jesus was the start of the conflict between the kingdom of God, in all its apparent weakness, and the kingdoms of the world, in all their actual power. It was an unequal contest right from the start—a baby born to poor parents is a king? Unheard of! Laughable! And yet...and yet...
- For others, Jesus was sent to turn the world upside down by revealing the powers of this world for what they truly are: self-centered, exploiting, oppressive, uncaring, injuring, destructive, death-dealing. In this line of thinking, Jesus came to upset the current world order so that a new world could emerge.
- And to counter the “principalities and powers,” Jesus brought in him: forgiveness, healing, liberation, restoration; all these things came wrapped up in this child, in this Savior.

I think there is truth in all these explanations for what Jesus is all about. And we can probably add even more if we want to ponder some more in our hearts. For tonight, though, let us simply receive the birth of Christ as he is meant to be received:

- He is God come down to earth.
- He is a real presence who reminds us God is not in some distant heaven high above the clouds.
- He is Emmanuel, God who is not far from us, but God who is with us.

Jesus brings in him new creation.

- In the beginning, God spoke a word and the universe was made.
- God sent Jesus, the word made flesh, and a new Creation has begun.

Now that we have arrived in Bethlehem, let us take this moment to peer over the wall of the stable. Let us gaze upon the manger and the child it holds. Here, we know, God meets us, in the midst of our lives. Tonight, we know the truth sung by the angels, and given voice in the hymn:

Love came down at Christmas,
 Love all lovely, love divine,
 Love was born at Christmas,
 Star and angels gave the sign.

This is what God was thinking when Jesus was born. This is the thought above all thoughts that counts in the gift God gave to us in Jesus: God was thinking about us...about you...about me...about all the whole world. God is still thinking about us...still loving us...will never stop loving us.

Thanks be to God for the birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior. Amen.