

Year A, December 24, 2016  
Christmas Eve  
Christ Church, Mexia

I love the story of the birth of Christ as told by the author of Luke – I have since I was a young child. Of course, when you are a child you don't think about the myriad ways of looking at it; you just take it as it is. But when we get older we become aware of different perspectives.

For example, the cartoonist Scott Hilburn, who draws *The Argyle Sweater*, depicts a woman sitting with her arms crossed among animals next to a manger with a child in it, much like we see in our crèche behind me. A man stands behind her saying, "How many times do I have to say I'm sorry?! I forgot to make reservations at the inn, okay?" And the caption at the bottom reads: "The real reason it was a silent night."

Of course, we can dissect the story for lack of historical accuracy – the time of year, was it really a stable, were there animals, etc. But that only tends to distract us and lessen the mood that we encounter with the darkness outside, the dim lights inside and the candles, poinsettias, etc., along with the ethereal story we just heard.

And none of the questions we might pose change what the author of the story wants us to know, beginning with the fact that tonight we celebrate the Incarnation of God among us. God is transcendent no more, regardless of when we celebrate. God, the Word, came to be one of mankind. And how did this happen? Not by a parting of the heavens, with Jesus descending in great glory for all the world to see and taking leadership in a powerful nation, but born as an infant, to an average family - and seemingly, no one noticed, with the possible exception of a few shepherds, and nothing changed.

But in fact, everything changed, for everyone – probably why the shepherds are in the story, because they were ordinary people, low in the social order of the day. But they are the ones to whom God unveils the beginning of the new covenant and because as we know these are the kind of people Jesus will spend his life among – healing them, bringing comfort and good news.

Like the story of the birth we heard tonight,

"God comes into our lives, not with blazing glory, but in the quiet of a stable.

God enters our world not with sound and fury, but in the whimpering of a new born child;

Not with power and authority but in the helplessness of a baby; not with class or privilege but as the displaced refugee with no nation of his own.

(And remember) the work of Christmas is our work (too). (When) God enters our lives, (everything changes, whether we acknowledge it or not).” God’s work becomes our work as well.

Our world needs Christmas badly, very badly; we need Christmas – not in all the ways it may be depicted in song and cards and media, but in the manifestation of hope, peace, joy and love. We are the ones who need to ponder the wonders of what we have heard tonight, to make an effort to understand them and to proclaim them to others, not just in words, but in deeds of love and caring.

We are the ones who can help to make this world better. What will change if we don’t change, to be more like Christ? How can there be hope for others if we have no hope? How can there be love if we don’t love? How can there be peace in our messy, complicated world, if we don’t do all that we can to help people understand what Christmas really means?

May you be blessed this night; may your faith be renewed; may you feel the love of God and God’s desire to be reconciled with you. Peace be with you.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.