

Christmas 2015

In the name of the one who created the heavens above, and the earth beneath; the one who most wonderfully restores, and the one who faithfully sustains us. Amen.

A long, long time ago... long before there were city lights to cloud our vision... anthropologists tell us that the ancient humans... humans of many cultures, would gather at the winter solstice... the darkest time of the year... They would gather under a starry sky at a high place with torches held up high and pray for the return of the light... because sometimes in the dark, we have doubts about that... doubts about whether the light will indeed return as it always has.... Light, the giver of warmth and growth... light the giver of life.

I don't know why it is that over the millennia we have looked to the heavens for God... looked for signs among the stars... maybe it is the phenomena of the night sky that so draws us... Maybe the heavens are an apt metaphor for God... distant, complete unto itself, majestic, eternal, unchanging, beautiful, life giving and life destroying. The Greeks depicted God as aloof in the heavens... they coined the term for God as the "unmoved mover", complete unto himself, mostly unapproachable... and that all we could know of God were the mysterious aspects of God present in the created order... the created order, a symbol, as it were, for what God might be like.

The institutional church has by and large bought into the Greek way of thinking about God... that God is distant, unapproachable... that humankind through its inadequacies and folly has created a gulf between heaven and earth... For the institutional church God lives in the esoteric mind of the theologian, in the dogmatic magisterium of the church, behind a veil on the altar in our sanctuaries... In the tabernacles of the reserved sacrament... In its paternalistic need for control the church has ironically protected us from the God of scripture... from the God we call Emmanuel... Emmanuel, God with us... The God of the institution, the aloof unmoved mover is safe... That God doesn't ask much of us beyond creeds and half-hearted belief... that is not the God we worship tonight.

So here we are at a high place, gathered together as did our ancestors millennia before us, beneath a starry sky... and we seek to make sense of a dark world around us... and we seek to make sense of the darkness that is within us as well... and we wonder if the familiar fear that seeps into our souls is justified or not.

Behold, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people... the angel announces... and he says that the child in the barn wrapped in bands of cloth is the sign... The angel uses language from Hebrew Scripture... tonight is born a savior, the messiah, the Lord.... But what does that mean... What does that mean to us whose symbols and churchy language have become worn and tattered... What does that mean to those of us inundated by the sound and fury of the post-modern world? I hope... ihope this night you are wondering what all of this talk of good news and great joy means.

So, a word for you tonight: God does not live in the inaccessible mind of the theologian, God does not live veiled in the sanctuaries and on the altars we have constructed... God is not up there or out there... God is not unseen, and unknowable... Brothers and sisters, God is love... and what we celebrate this night is that Love is borne by flesh and blood...the birth of the holy child is sign for us... that Love can only exist in the flesh... The love of God is not unattainable or unknowable... the love of God makes its home in human flesh and blood... the love of God is borne by the creatures of earth amid the ebb and flow of life, amid the dark and the light, amid grief and pain, and in exultation and joy, amid all the chaos life can muster... the child born in poverty on the margins of life is sign for us... that the light of love will seek out every dark corner and make its home in the human heart.... And it will move us, as God moves... for the well being of all people.

I have heard it said by preachers no less... that God is self sufficient... that God needs nothing to be God... But I don't believe that is true... The tidings of good news and joy that we just heard read, are not just for us, they are for God as well... Because God can't love without us... God... God who is love, has chosen, if you will, to take on human flesh... so that God's love will be made known in the deepest parts of us... For God there is no other way... God chooses us to love. The secret is this: that to love is to know God, and to love is to make God known... I

would say that it is as simple as that... but Love isn't simple... It requires courage and imagination... It requires commitment and responsibility and sacrifice... and tonight we claim solidarity with the holy child, that we are born for love.... This birth is good news for God... that love and life, God's life, have found a home in earth... in the form of an at risk child, fragile and weak... but full of promise and possibility... The human heart is enough for God's purposes, because in the grand sweep of the universe, it is the human heart that loves... and love sets the stars in the heavens, and brings bounty from the earth... love changes everything, and love casts out all fear, because in the face of love, fear can't stand.

Dear people of God, this Christmas pray for the child... pray that the child will learn to love well... pray that this child will love neighbor above self.... Pray that this child will rejoice in every shared meal... pray that this child will seek and serve... pray that this child will love kindness, and do justice, and walk in this ever so short life humbly but resilient.... Pray for the child here at this high place in the dark... that the light... the light that is the love of God will take root in our humanity, as it always has, and as it always will... and ramify.