

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7, Micah 5:2-5a, Luke 2:1-20
12/24/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.
Christmas Eve Meditation
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One of my all-time favorite television shows is a comedy improv show entitled “Whose Line Is It Anyway?” On that show, four comedians make up skits on the spot, following the guidelines of various games that give them prompts. Two of the comedians on the show are a short, bald Canadian named Colin Mochrie and a tall, gangly American named Ryan Styles, and the two of them playing off one another are very funny. One game is called questions only, and the comedians have to phrase every line in the form of question. Not too long ago, Ryan and Colin were leading off this game of questions, and as it was the holiday season, they were informed that their setting was Bethlehem about 2000 years ago. So Ryan approached Colin and said, “Innkeeper, do you have a room for the night?” To which Colin responded, “Can’t you see the ‘no vacancy’ sign?” Ryan replied, “Can’t you see my wife is about to have a baby any minute now?” Colin said, “How is that my fault?” And Ryan, in the role of Joseph, responded, “Would you believe me if I told you it’s not my fault either?”

Our choir tonight, seemed to be playing the question game as well. Were you there? Did you see? Did you hear? Did you know? And on a practical level, we might answer back that of course we weren’t there. With each passing year, it gets more and more challenging to imagine ourselves back in that time and place. So much about the way we think, the way we understand one another, has changed since that very first Christmas night, due in large part, to the life and ministry of the one who entered the world that night. Jesus taught us to love enemies, to see neighbors in those who are different, to have compassion for the marginalized, to learn vulnerability and servanthood as the real strength and power of love at work.

And yet, something about that night invites us in. There’s a timeless quality about it that enables us to find ourselves there. We often think of Advent as a journey to Bethlehem. Perhaps because Mary and Joseph were forced to journey there by a Roman Emperor bent on taxing his people. Perhaps because Magi journey across lands and languages and customs and great distance in order to bow before the King of the Jews – a journey made all the more remarkable given that they weren’t Jewish and hadn’t spent centuries awaiting a Messiah. Perhaps its because Shepherds abiding out in the fields in the dark left their flocks and journeyed back into town to see the Emmanuel that the Angels had all been singing about. So we, too, journey along with them, taking in the terrors of their time. They’re not different enough from the terrors of our own time. Like the Magi and the shepherds, we know we’ll find a welcome at the manger – that all kinds of unlikely people are invited to kneel down and worship there.

But if we kneel there just a moment and really take in the scene, it should perhaps occur to us that the most incredible journey in that room isn’t the one that Mary and Joseph took, or the shepherds or the magi or even we ourselves journeying across the centuries. In that lowly manger, in a stable built for animals, amidst hay and bands of cloth, there lays a tiny, helpless infant, who has made the most incredible journey of all. He’s maybe 7 or 8 pounds. Can’t do anything. No teeth. Can’t eat anything. Can’t even hold his head up. But leaving behind all of heaven’s glory, God is become flesh dwelling among us. Christmas is not the culmination of a journey we make to God, but rather, the trembling beginning of a journey God makes to us.

Several years ago, I heard about a group of Americans who were tasked with transporting several infants from Vietnam to the United States in the mid-1970s after the Vietnam War had ended. One of the men on that trip noticed that the baby he was responsible for on the flight had eyes that

overflowed with tears, but she never made a sound. He was not at all certain whether she was crying or had some kind of eye infection. The leader of the group, who had far more experience with war orphans, shook her head sadly, and explained that in many cases orphan babies cry without making a sound because they learned long ago that when they cry, no one will come.

That's the kind of story that breaks our hearts. A child quits crying when she learns that no one will come. But it isn't our story. When we cry out, someone comes. God understands our troubles, trials, hardships, grief. Christmas is not something we do. It is something that God does. Christmas is a gift of grace in the form of God's presence with us all through life's journey. But I know all too well, it doesn't always feel that way, does it? Sometimes it seems the dawn will never break over the horizon. Sometimes, we feel like that baby on the plane. We cry in silence, not expecting anyone to come.

That's how it was in Jesus' time too. They'd all but given up hope. They hadn't had a prophet in centuries. They hadn't had many victories or any sign or shadow of Davidic figure to take the helm. They were leaderless, powerless, defeated, and divided into factions – frightened, angry, vulnerable. It never ceases to intrigue me that the two major Christian holy days – Christmas and Easter – both begin in chaos and darkness, with crowds of people who've traveled from other places: shepherds abiding in the fields in the dark or women bringing spices to the tomb before dawn has broken. What that says to me is that God is doing incredible things when most of the world is still in the dark, both literally and figuratively. The hymns say it best: In the dark streets shineth an everlasting light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

It's easy to see the fears, but don't lose sight of the hope. It's the bigger story tonight. For in the person of Jesus, God made flesh, God is rewriting the essence of human existence, you see. Do not be afraid of the darkness of ignorance, for wisdom is breaking in. Do not be afraid of the darkness of suffering, for love is to be experienced in it. Do not be afraid of the darkness of violence, for peace may be found within, even in the midst of it. Do not be afraid of the darkness of your own vulnerability, weakness, frailty, for that is the soil in which God works to rebirth the world. Do not be afraid of the darkness of sin or death, for God has already defeated it. Do not be afraid of the darkness, for hope lives even before the sun rises. And as surely as the sun rises, so the Spirit of God moves. And God comes to a world where cries are lost in the echo-chamber of our hubris. The magic of Christmas isn't just for children – it's for anyone who has ever had their heart broken or their dreams crushed. Christmas is the promise that God understands, but even more, that God is moving; healing, resurrecting, birthing. That God is here now.

Let me close with a story. On December 21, 1906, an inventor with the National Weather Service – a guy named Reginald Fessenden – successfully conducted the first trans-Atlantic radio broadcast. Imagine the shock of being a ship captain or lighthouse keeper listening for the dots and dashes of Morse Code when suddenly, through your little speaker, you hear someone reading Luke 2, and then playing, on the violin, a song by French Poet Placide Cappeau. Long lay the world in sin and error pining till he appeared, and the soul felt it's worth. A thrill of hope; the weary world rejoices for yonder breaks a new and glorious dawn.... The first song to ever go out over radio was "O Holy Night". And it is a holy night. This night proves unequivocally that God loves us. Don't look for that to make sense, because sometimes it doesn't. We feel utterly unlovable. But we aren't. And while this is comforting, don't look for it to be comfortable, because sometimes it isn't. Following a God who loves the broken, the suffering, the despised, the questioning, the jaded puts a demand on us, on our values and priorities. Yet God is not content to leave us crying in silence and darkness. The message of this night is that sooner or later, the light always comes, permeating the grief, piercing despair, spilling out into the dark streets where we discover God with us. Thanks be to God. Amen.