

Christmas Eve Meditation 2015
Preacher: Rev. Lauren Lorincz
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Christmas Eve Meditation, Pilgrim Congregational Church UCC, (Luke 2:1-20 & "From Heaven's Porch") December 24, 2015

A young couple journeys to a foreign town far from home. The young woman is pregnant and will soon give birth. They are poor and vulnerable. The powers that be are calling the shots in their story. The couple seeks shelter and safety for themselves and for their child soon to be born. People turn them away, saying that there's just no room for you here. There is no place for you at the inn.

The time comes for the young woman to deliver her child. She gives birth far from her family with only her fiancé at her side helping her through the uncertainty and the pain. Though the circumstances of this birth are far from ideal, the couple has each other and a healthy child is born into our world.

Yes, this is the story of Jesus of Nazareth's birth in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago as narrated by Luke's Gospel. It also echoes the circumstances of people displaced by war and political turmoil today. There are still young couples who are poor and vulnerable. There are still places where the powers that be are calling the shots. There are still places where young parents want nothing more than shelter and safety for their children and are turned away into the night.

The story of Jesus' birth transcends time and place if we have the eyes to see and the ears to hear and the hearts to be open to the timelessness of this story. We could say that this birth happened while Quirinius was Governor of Syria. Or we could say that similar births are happening as Bashar al-Assad is President of Syria. It's a story that's a little hard to hear if we stop and think about what actually happened. It's a story that still resonates.

At the end of the day, there are still places in our world where babies are born under difficult circumstances with parents who are frightened by what the future holds for their precious child. That's the reality that on all Christmas Eves has to be named this year or else our Christian faith isn't very relevant or real at all.

Though here's the hope. Here's the Good News in these stories—there is brilliant light that shines in the darkness and the darkness has never and will never overcome that light. The light that shines in the darkness is God with us through it all. Radically present in our lives if we do have the eyes to see and the ears to hear and hearts open to that light. God does not leave us alone in the midst of life's adversities. Jesus is Emmanuel: God-with-Us forever.

Hear the good news of great joy for all the people! "Long lay the world in sin and error pining, til He appeared and the soul felt its worth." Maybe what we hold onto are the first words after the birth of Jesus Christ. Words from an angel to shepherds living in their fields, keeping watch over their flock by night: "Do not be afraid."^[1]

Do not be afraid, fear not, and similar phrases can be found in the pages of the Bible 365 times. This is one of the most important messages the writers of the Bible wanted people of faith to know for all time and in all places.

God is with you, do not be afraid.

Do not be afraid, God is with you.

Christmas Eve is just the beginning of the story of Jesus' remarkable life. As John Thornburg writes in his poem, "From Heaven's Porch": "There was a baby once whose birth was trumpeted from heaven's porch. When he grew up he did not hide the truth. He loved us as we are, and called us to abundant life." We are all too human and we do sometimes fear that we cannot be loved as-is, that we need to put on a mask to be presentable to the world and the people out there. If we're honest, we are in need of a better way to be. And a reminder that we can be comfortable in our own skins—loving who we are and loving each other as they are. No questions asked, no qualifications met.

Christians turn to Jesus to understand how we are to live and how we are to love. For Christians, Jesus is the decisive revelation of God. Jesus is the epiphany of what God is like—loving us as we are, and calling us to abundant life. Embodying that we are to be compassionate in all that we say and in all that we do. "Truly He taught us to love one another. His law is love and His Gospel is peace."

It is no wonder that the angels sang of this Bethlehem baby. And that we still sing of him 2,000 years later. We still sing of him knowing that there are births that may be similar to his. And just as God was present with Mary and Joseph and Jesus in that stable, God is present with people here and now. We can respond to people in need with radical hospitality--showing forth compassion.

The good news of this night is that it's never too late for us to shine our lights in the darkness. It's never too late to walk the path of peace.

For tonight, love is born into the world anew. And we can let those words first spoken by angels to shepherds on a dark night sink into our hearts: do not be afraid.

God is with us, do not be afraid.

Do not be afraid, God is with us.

Thanks be to God and Merry Christmas. Amen.

[1] Luke 2:10.