

Christmas Eve
December 24, 2020
Text: Luke 2:1-20

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Merry Christmas! If there was ever a year when I needed to feel the joy and peace of Christmas, this is it. This has been a year like no other, and a Christmas like no other. It's been a year with a lot of uncertainty, and a lot of worry, and feeling like there are lots of things way out of my control. It's been a year with a lot of grief. So tonight I'd like to share with you the kind of word I need to hear on Christmas like this—and I hope it's what you need to hear as well.

The story that Luke tells is so simple. We know it so well. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem, where Mary gave birth to a baby boy. She named him Jesus, and swaddled him securely and laid him down to sleep in a manger, because there was no room in the inn. Angels announced the birth to shepherds—this baby is our Savior—and the shepherds were amazed at how God fulfilled God's promises.

And in this year of a pandemic and protests and forest fires, and more, the first thing that speaks to me from this simple story is that God sees us. God sees our need, our hurt. God sees the things that drag us down, the forces that feel so much stronger than we are, and God looks on us with compassion. God sees us for who we are, for the mess of a world we live in, and God doesn't turn away. Instead, God turns toward us, to be with us. Perhaps for you this year has felt so isolating, so full of anxiety or loneliness or boredom. God knows. And in our need, God looks on us with compassion, with love, and God comes to us.

And in this year of so much isolation, of fractured relationships and polarized public life, the next thing that speaks to me is that God's compassion moves God to make a connection with us. In the birth of Jesus, God makes the human condition part of God's own experience. God embraces our limits, embraces our mortality, and draws us into life with God. Being born of Mary, God reaches out to touch our lives, to heal our wounds, to fill our emptiness, and to restore our connection to God and to each other. Perhaps for you this year has felt so disjointed, so out of whack. God knows. And in our need, God comes to us to make life whole.

And in this year when it feels like everything is on hold and nothing is normal, the final thing that speaks to me is that when God reaches out to us, when God makes a connection with us, God holds nothing back. God is all in. There are no half-measures from God. Instead, God is completely committed to us, to healing the human family. In the birth of Jesus, God shows us what vulnerable love looks like, because that is the only power capable of healing our wounds and restoring wholeness to the human family. Perhaps for you this year has felt like a huge interruption in your life, or like a huge hole in your life. God knows. And in our need, God holds nothing back, no matter what the cost is to God.

That's how the Christmas story is speaking to me this year. Jesus, born in Bethlehem, is what God does when God sees us, sees our need and our hurt. God turns to us with compassion. God looks on us with compassion, and reaches out to make a connection with us, to draw us into life with God, a life where there is peace and joy. And when God reaches out to us, God holds

absolutely nothing back. God is all in to bring healing to us and to our world. So in this strange, strange year, when everything is upside down, that's the Christmas message I need to hear—that even a year like this does not hinder God, cannot stop God from coming to us with love and forgiveness and unending grace.

And I hope the message I needed to hear speaks to you too, and I wish you a blessed Christmas. Amen.