

Sermon for *Julotta* Christmas Day Worship
Luke 2:1-20

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First Immanuel Lutheran, Portland OR
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Through the days leading up to Christmas, I've had one particular family on my mind and heart. I met this family when I was helping at an overnight shelter-- a mom, a dad, and three children who were without a home. The youngest child was just a newborn baby, which is what really moved me and worried me. I don't know what led this family to be in that vulnerable situation, but it was plain to see that both mother and father were doing their best to provide for their children under very stressful conditions.

They were staying overnight in a large, echoing church gymnasium, with several other families. Some wooden dividers were set up for privacy, but the gym was noisy as the evening wore on. Can you imagine being a mother trying to recover from giving birth and nursing your new baby with all that activity around? Can you imagine juggling a baby in your arms while you're also working to set up your family sleeping area with mats and bedding for your toddler and preschooler? Then trying to settle those restless children down when bedtime came? And in the dark of night, after the overhead fluorescent lights were finally turned out, can you imagine how you as an exhausted parent would be able to find a few hours rest amid the questions and concerns that were circling in your mind?

This homeless family could take nothing for granted. Their shelter was temporary, they were doing what they could to make it work. It took a lot of courage. And I don't know where their journey took them after that, but I've been praying for them, for a job and a permanent place to raise those kids they loved.

And of course at Christmas, I am thinking how much that family had in common with another small family, 2000 years ago. How our own Savior was born into a vulnerable situation like theirs. Homeless and on the road. Not sheltered in an echoing church gymnasium, with a slippery tile floor and fluorescent lights overhead – but sheltered in a drafty stable, in a stall intended for animals, with straw as the only bedding where baby and parents could lay their heads. It was a temporary shelter, with no guarantees for the future.

Yet this is the place where Jesus Christ, the Messiah, Savior of the World, was born. Not a place of comfort or privilege or wealth, but a makeshift place of poverty and uncertainty. This is the place where God chose to enter the human race and become one of us.

Jesus' humble birth shows he is a Savior for all people. Not just the powerful or rich who dominate the world's attention – but even more for those without power or wealth, whose needs go unnoticed or are trampled by others. Their wellbeing is of utmost importance to Almighty God and those who seek God's ways. Scripture tells us Jesus came to lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things (Luke 1:52-53). He came as Prince of Peace, to bring all humanity together for the good of this planet and its people (Isaiah 9:6).

Christ did not come to bring personal salvation to a lucky few. He was born to bring God's goodness and peace to all the earth. To unite all people in love and justice. To show us God's way of self-giving love, where every child of earth is valued. Every one.

What hopes do you bring with you to Christmas worship this morning? Hope for a better future, for a society that shows respect to all people, compassion to the vulnerable, welcome to the refugee and stranger... Hope for a world that pursues peace with just as much vigor as it pursues war... Hope for our planet, to preserve the natural world... We all carry deep hopes, for ourselves and others.

And what hope are you needing to receive today? What kinds of struggles or longing are you experiencing? What are you yearning for on this Christmas dawn?

When hope is scarce, we need to trust in someone greater than ourselves. And Christmas reminds us that all goodness comes from God.

Christmas hope comes from God born into this world, never to leave it. God loves us so much that God became one of us. A tiny baby. The very definition of hope. Because a baby is human life stretching into a new space of time. A baby is any family's stake in a future many of them will not live to see. When parents or grandparents nurture a new generation, they come to care in a much deeper way about what will happen years down the road.

The birth of Jesus shows how infinitely God cares about you and me, and all earth's children. God does not stand apart like a watchmaker who winds up the universe and just lets it go. No, God devotes infinite love and attention to this world. God is "all in" with the human race, God is personally invested in how we live and what we become. At Christmas, God's own Son is born to us and never will leave us, no matter what dark times or joyful times may come.

This Christmas dawn, the early morning, is a time of tender hope. In our vision of Bethlehem, the baby sleeps, the parents doze, the animals snuffle about the stable. The sun begins to lighten the sky in the east. It is the beginning of a Savior's life.

And here in Portland, Oregon, each Christmas dawn is a new beginning for us, too. No matter how many years we have numbered, or how many Christmases we have greeted, this morning we greet a fresh promise of God's love and peace—for us and for all. Something our weary world so much needs.

Do we dare to hope anew this morning? God invites us to receive this gift that God is giving, the gift of a Christ Child, freely given to every child of earth.

Blessed Christmas. God Yul. Amen.