

Sermon  
Christmas Eve--2021  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
William Bradbury

Isaiah 9:2-7  
Psalm 96  
Titus 2:11-14  
Luke 2:1-14(15-20)

Years ago, in order to build up the economy, the Christmas story was turned into a fairytale that begins, like all fairytales, with the words: "Once upon a time..."

"Once upon a time in a holy land far, far, away, a beautiful young woman gave birth to a supernatural child. The people celebrated this birth once a year by giving and receiving gifts and singing silly songs about a jolly old elf and chestnuts roasting on an open fire, neither of which anyone had ever seen. But it made some people happy to gather with their families and other people unhappy because they couldn't gather with their families, but year after year they continued to celebrate the birth, though it was hard to find someone old enough who remembered who the child was and why it made sense to give gifts in his name."

**The angels tonight, however, do not proclaim a fairy tale, but good news of great joy for real people living in the real world.**

**It is the true story of the All-Loving Creator God becoming flesh in our world to be with us.**

**Because this isn't a fairytale, the God made flesh may not be exactly the God we want, but the God made flesh is most certainly the One we need.**

+We may want a powerful leader, but we get a powerless, unarmed Jewish peasant who begins his life on the wood of a feeding trough and ends his life on the wood of a Roman cross.

+We may want a god like Santa who brings gifts only to nice people like us.

But we get a man who gives his time and attention to the sick and broken. That's why the angels make their announcement to shepherds in the field and not to the wealthy in their homes.

+We may want a kindly grandfather who asks nothing of us, but we get an on-fire 30-year-old who calls us to follow him in realizing God's agenda for healing, peace, and justice, using only the weapons of grace and mercy.

+We may want a charismatic priest who fills our church with the well-educated and sophisticated, but we get a man who chooses fishermen, tax-collectors, and sex-workers to be his followers.

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Gregory Boyle is a Jesuit priest who worked for decades with gangs in Los Angeles. Boyle says in his book, Tattoos on the Heart, that **"The strategy of Jesus is not centered in taking the right stand on issues, but rather in standing in the right place—with the outcast and those relegated to the margins."**

Of course, as you might imagine, he got push back from some of his regular parishioners when they allowed homeless men to sleep in the church.

So during one Sunday sermon he asks the congregation what does the church smell like. Someone answers, "It smells like feet. "

"Why does it smell like feet?" he asks.

Cuz, many homeless men slept here last night, says a woman.

Well, why do we let that happen here?

It's what we've committed to do, says another.

Well, why would anyone commit to do that?

**It's what Jesus would do.**

Well, then, what's the church smell like now?

**"A man stands and bellows, "It smells like commitment."**

I would say it smells like a place in which Jesus is proud to be.

**Boyle says, "Jesus was not a man *for* others, He was [a man] *with* others."** Tattoos on the Heart, Page 72 emphasis original

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In Jesus God has entered Life—all of it—***in order to be with*** us!

***Therefore, the Christmas Story isn't a fairytale about a baby becoming God, but the true story of God becoming a baby.***

***Lying in filthy bands of cloth, surrounded by illiterate shepherds and scared-to-death parents, he can't even conjure up for himself an empty room.***

***'God made flesh' has emptied Godself of every power, save one: the power of love.***

***This Love is the cosmic glue of the Universe that is evolving and luring us all into Christ's union of Oneness and Wholeness with Father-Mother God.***

This Cosmic Love shows up in every tree and not just in the ones with colored lights.

This Cosmic Love is present with us even when we are naughty.

**'God in Flesh' is not the God we want, but the God we need. Therefore,** Jesus tells us to slow down and see God here and now: to consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air and see God in our neighbors and in our enemies and in the midst of our own lives.

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 Something in me tonight wants to stay in the past—in my memories of Christmas as a child in Atlanta when everyone I loved was still alive and I didn't know the consequences of missing the mark.

**There is no sin in nostalgia. It is good to remember and to give thanks for the many who have blessed us along the way and always to remember to consign our past to the mercy of God.**

But there is even more to receive from **'God made flesh'**:

+If there is joy for you tonight, give thanks, for God is in your joy.  
 +If you are lonely and sad tonight, missing someone you love—give thanks, for God is in your sadness.  
 +If you are afraid of the suffering to come, give thanks, for God is there in your nervous heart and will never, ever, forsake you.

***The God who is continually making you and loving you, is Jesus, the 'God made flesh' who is with you this and every night.***

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**It turns out to be a good thing that there was no room in the inn, so we might wake up and notice that God is in the middle of our real lives—even in the middle of our Covid omicron lives.**

**Then we can make it our own prayer, the line from "O, Little Town of Bethlehem" written three years after the horrors of the Civil War by Phillips Brooks, Episcopal priest and then Bishop of Massachusetts:**

"O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray, cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today."