

Christmas Eve Meditation  
First Presbyterian Church  
December 24, 2006

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Lake Forest, Illinois

***"Light has been born.  
Truth has a face.  
The angels are singing.  
Heaven is celebrating.  
Tell out the good news.  
Christ has been born!"***

Often our Christian faith happens in those moments when we are still, when there is no sound, and when we look into the face of a new born baby. In those moments light is born, truth has a face.

Just for a moment, "in the bleak of mid-winter" – at Christmas time, in the silence as something comes to life, some spirit, some hope – as something is born again into a world that is so strange and new and so precious.

The child is born in the night among the beasts; the smell of sweet breath along with the steaming dung and nothing is ever the same.

Those of us who believe in God can never in a way be sure of him again. Once we have seen him in the stable, we can never be sure where he will appear again or to what lengths God will go in his pursuit of humankind.

If the holiness and the power and majesty of God were present in this seemingly lowly of all events, this birth of a peasant's child, then there is no place or time so lowly, so earthbound, but that holiness can be present there also.

That can be reassuring – God is ever present, breaking through to us at all times and places in our life. But it can also mean in another way, that we are never safe, that is that there is no place where we can hide from God. No place where we are safe from his power to break in two and recreate the human heart, because it is where he seems most helpful that he is most strong and just where we least expect him he comes most fully.

For those who believe in God, it means, this birth, that God himself is never safe from us, and maybe that is the dark side of Christmas, the terror of the silence. He comes in such a way that we can always turn him down. God:

- Comes to us in the hungry people we do not have to feed;
- Comes to us in the lonely people we do not have to comfort;
- Comes to us in the desperate human need of people everywhere, people that we are always free to turn our backs upon.

It means that God puts himself at our mercy not only in the sense of the suffering that we can cause him by our blindness and coldness and cruelty, but the suffering that we can cause him simple by suffering ourselves.

Because that is the way love works, when someone we love suffers, we suffer with them, and we would not have it otherwise because the suffering and the love are one, just as it is with God's love for us.

The child is born in the night – the mother's exhausted flesh, the father's face has anxiety written all over it – and nothing, nothing is ever the same again.

There are so many things that I don't like about the Christmas season – the emphasis on shopping, all the worrying about trying to find the perfect gift – the “ho – ho – ho” weary Santa Clauses, and the endless catalogues that arrive daily in our mail boxes. Catalogues that contain: things that we neither need nor want or things we want but do not need.

But there are things about Christmas that I do like:

- For me it is the special times with family and friends
- The music of advent hymns and the familiar carols
- Candlelight evenings in front of the fire place, and
- The sending and receiving of Christmas cards and letters

Each year we hear from dear friends from our past life. This year there was one card in particular, it was a picture and a letter that we received from Meg's college friends, Gary and Rosalyn, who Meg has remained close to through all these years. Rosalyn has four children; three of them have been married for some time, but up until this time no grandchildren. So when we opened this year's card and Rosalyn was holding a beautiful baby boy Meg was so excited.

But as Meg read the card she began to weep. Burke was born prematurely with a congenital disease of the esophagus and within 24 hours was in surgery. After two major surgeries, many procedures, and a great deal of care, he was now finally home, but he still has a tube in his stomach, cannot go anywhere for fear of infection, and he is deaf.

But through it all their son Nate and his wife Chris, along with Gary and Rosalyn, have kept the faith. Even though their hearts have been broken in two, they have been blessed with the presence of this beautiful baby boy. Rosalyn says that Nate and Chris have been just “awesome parents.” They literally lived in his hospital room for the several months. They have all lived on the edge, but Rosalyn in her letter wrote: through all of this “God was always there, holding Burke in His hand – His grace is sufficient.”

You see there is no place where we are safe from God's power to break in two and recreate the human heart, because it is where he seems most helpful that he is most strong and just where we least expect him, he comes most fully.

As I looked closely at the card, Rosalyn is cradling this lovely little boy in her arms; his head held securely in her hand; his innocent face with his eyes looking so calm and serene, gazing up into his grandmother's loving eyes; one cannot help but think that the Christian faith does happen in those moments when we are still and we look into the face of the new born baby.

Below the picture on the card is the night time silhouette of the manger scene with the bright shining star pointing down to Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus with the caption overhead: "Rejoice a King is born."

Nothing is ever the same again for those who believe. The night grows still and maybe the only sound is that of the baby's cry, the little agony of new life coming alive, and maybe there are also the same legions of unseen voices raised in joy.

Nothing is ever quite the same again because what we have seen and heard in the moment of stillness is, just possibly, the hope of the world.

In that moment we feel the stirring of new life, new courage, and new gladness seeking to be born.

Let us pray:

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Most High, Prince of Peace, be born again into our world. Wherever there is war in this world, wherever there is pain, wherever there is loneliness, wherever there is no hope. Come, long expected one, with healing in they wings.*

*Holy Child, whom the shepherds and the kings and the beasts adored, be born again. Wherever there is boredom, wherever there is fear of failure, wherever there is temptation, wherever there is bitterness of heart, come thou Blessed One, with healing in they wings.*

*Savior, be born in each of us as we raise our faces to they face, not knowing fully who we are or who you are, knowing only that your love is beyond our knowing and that no other has the power to make us whole.*

*Come Lord Jesus, to each who longs for you even though we have forgotten your name.*

*Come quickly. Amen*