

Blessed be God who animates our lives and calls us to come to the manger to witness the birth of the holy child and to let that child be born in us each day. AMEN

Be born in us this day. a familiar and beautiful refrain we sing at Christmas. It is fraught with expectation and desire and yearning. Yet, when I think of the complications and chaos of the world and the fact that in our evermore global community Christmas is celebrated at different times even different days as the world turns, I wonder whether Christmas might be less an event and more a way of life. More the dream we dream everyday if we are not afraid or desperate. More the foretaste of things to come. More needed each day!

For the Incarnation which is why we are gathered is no less a mystery than the Resurrection. it is timeless and full and expansive. We don't get to the resurrection without the holy birth. And this Christmas I feel called to recover that mystery to honor it and to give glory to God for the most precious gift given...to us! Forever!

There is a story told by one of the brothers at SSJE in Cambridge about a man in a town he knew who wished everyone no matter what day it was Merry Christmas. For some odd, for some annoying, for some disconcerting and for the monk this greeting caused him to ponder. When asked the man said Christ was born everyday somewhere someway in God's time Christ was always being born, always coming into the world. (I will address the resurrecting part at Easter?!) And to me it made perfect sense, after all I keep a christmas tree up all year with ornaments which are precious to me and remind me of the holy gift of each day.

But our God is so amazing and generous that within the space of each fleeting moment, waits a precious gift: an opportunity to take part in these sacred stories of our death, birth, return, and resurrection in Christ. These passing moments of the here and now might seem like nothing at all, but by God's infinite mercy, and very fortunately for us, the eternal life of peace, joy, and love in God's Kingdom can fit comfortably within.

The Holy One invites us to be born again of the spirit, in each eternal now. It's like an endless stream of Christmas gifts, each lovingly wrapped and offered in the hope that we notice the gift, accept it, and open it.

So, in a way our friend who wishes everyone a "Merry Christmas" may be on to something. We can see it as an anticipation and celebration of this wonderful, eternal, baptismal gift of Christ being born at a time not too long ago, in a place not very far away — now in the stillness of our hearts.( nicholas bartoli ssje )

It also makes sense to me in a crazy nonsensical way because there seems to be a constant reverberation of birth death and resurrection always cycling in the world since it began...since the Incarnation. Since the Word became flesh. And while some of us have attended countless Christmas Eve services they are always the same and always different. Just like a baptism or a eucharist. We find ourselves in the midst of a process of God's grace being poured into the world. The Holy Arc of the fullness of time. We return to the place we have known before and yet again as though for the first time. (TS Eliot)

**Our** call is, I believe, to pause and appreciate the wonder and miracle of it all, to lean into the mystery, and for a brief moment to know and take into our hearts the dear Christ child. How silently

how silently He enters in the wondrous gift, the wonder of all wonders.

At Christmas we don't just remember the birth of Christ Jesus, we ourselves become Christ bearers. The German Dominican, Meister Eckhart, wrote in the fourteenth century, "What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in *my* time and *my* culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of God is begotten in us."

This cannot be a one moment thing. This cannot be a blink and you miss it kind of thing. This must be such an unfathomable, profoundly awesome gift as to take a lifetime of Incarnation experiences to appreciate....and to respond to...

that is our part...to take Christ into our hearts and to respond. Like the creatures, like the shepherds, like the wise ones, as well as those who were not physically at the manger but nevertheless were consumed by an eternal flame of Christ's love, like Simeon, like the walkers on the road to Emmaus. all departed from their experience of holy recognition transformed that they might transform the world.

All the Gospels unfold to tell the stories of those affected by this birth, this Word made flesh, this Light which the darkness cannot overcome, this Great Shepherd, this way this truth and this life. All Gospels unfold to tell the stories of Love enfleshed.

So for some of us we come here tonight to catch a glimpse, to feel a sensation, to be drenched in light and love. Some of us come this Christmas Eve to lay our Christmas experiences of the past at the manger that the birth be fuller, more whole this year.

Simeon captures this piercing experience of recognition in the depth and profundity of knowing Christ in our midst, be it baby, man or vision; be it oxen, sheep or neighbor; be it communion or shared meal.

The grace of the Incarnation which we celebrate tonight and upon which our faith is based is not like any other encounter we have had. It is holy sacred and miraculous. It is unexpected yet anticipated. It is unknown and yet believed. From it our faith springs like from the root of Jesse's tree and seeks understanding from that point on as well as service. It is the grace which surpasses understanding yet causes us to be Kingdom bearers.

So will we be like the shepherds who say yes to an angel, in a marianic way. They come they witness and they go away in silence filled with the Love of CHrist.

Will we be like the wise ones who follow a star, a dream, a vision haphazardly to the manger? And lay our gifts before Him?

May we all be like Simeon upon recognizing the Christ Child in the temple drops to his knees and proclaims: Lord you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised for these eyes of mine have seen the saviour whom you have prepared for all the world to see, a light to enlighten the nations and the glory of your people Israel. May we have such an indwelling experience of Christ this night or another in God's time that we are forever changed.

The song of Simeon is also known as the nunc dimitis which translates now dismissed. It resounds in my heart this christmas for reasons unknown but not necessary to explain because it is always everyday my desire for you to be called to the manger, to

gaze into the heart of God and to be set free with a freedom which is heretofore undefined and certainly unbounded.

In Compline the poetic end of the day service of daily prayer it is the closing prayer introduced and closed by the antiphon: Guide us waking o Lord and guard us sleeping that awake we may watch with christ and asleep we may rest in peace.

this is the holy rhythm and assurance of our days. Divine incarnation took the form of an Indwelling Presence in every human soul and surely all creatures in some way. Angels, animals, trees, water, and, yes, bread and wine seem to fully accept and enjoy their wondrous fate. Ironically, it is only our human freedom that gives us the ability to resist and deny our core identities by refusing to participate in the flow of life through games of negativity, exclusion, or unlove. We even do this to ourselves. (Richard Rohr)

Tonight it is my hope that you truly know the joy of this abiding and keeping. The peace of this heavenly rhythm of going into the world with Christ and resting with or being guided by the angels in safety.

Tonight I wish you a merry christmas but please know it is also my daily prayer for you. Be born in us today and everyday. Come to us abide with us our Lord Emmanuel. God with us.

Merry Christmas! God bless us everyone!