

Blessed be God who animates our lives and gave his only begotten son, the Word made flesh, that we might know salvation. AMEN

At this particular moment on this most holy night, my cup runneth over with love and gratitude for Christ's birth, for all of you, and for the hope and joy in our gaze at the manger, and for the future! I feel blessed to be here among you, touched by the divine light of Christ, and on the brink of entering more deeply into this beloved community!

I promise I will not speak at length tonight, the sermon this holy night is in the liturgy and in the birth and in the promise. But I would like to shine a light on the beauty of this night, the beauty of this sanctuary, the beauty of the sanctuaries within your hearts.

Throughout this Advent season we have journeyed together and wrestled with paradox and contrasts. We have done so as a people who live in between: in between darkness and light, in between womb and tomb, in between Christ's birth, resurrection, living Presence and second coming.

This very in-betweenness has become a space for us to contemplate the contrasts of our lives and to loosen our grips on our expectations that we might surrender to the magnificence and glory of God's restoration and reconciliation of differences.

Each Sunday with the assistance of the Gospel, Scripture, stories, hymns and prayers as well as the Advent Wreath and rotating Eucharistic Prayers, we have turned and rotated our thoughts around and through different lenses and prompts. Contemplating Peace, Love, Hope, Joy have brightened our sometimes dark times, our struggles with corruption and injustice, our misplaced idolatry and dependences.

Tonight your faces tell a story of Advent conversion! I am not suggesting that some grand dramatic experience of God has happened to each of us. I am however wondering whether all of us have turned or been turned as though riding that arc of salvation ever so gently and in our own unique ways, with God's help, that we participate tonight differently than we would have several weeks ago.

The key to any transformation, the key to our salvation, is ironic and also fully among us: Our salvation comes from something small, tender, and vulnerable, something hardly noticeable. God, who is the Creator of the Universe, comes to us in smallness, weakness, and hiddenness. God in the Incarnation imbues our world with divinity and holiness.

The "how" of this is contemplation. Contemplation is the process of gazing and praying and connecting to the holy. *The contemplative moment is a spiritual event that kisses the cognitive but will not be enslaved to its rigidities.* Tonight that contemplation, not just for mystics, takes us to the manger. Tonight we, like the shepherds, have changed our orientation toward Bethlehem and have arrived at the manger, led by a star, inspired by angels, to gaze on the Holy Child again as though for the first time.

We gaze at Salvation

And the realization of that salvation comes from a contemplative gaze into a tiny mystery which is infinitely and eternally large. Tonight we receive and hold gently the gift of Love and Grace, fully human and fully divine. The fully humanness which mirrors our own image made in God's gives us hope and possibility. The fully divineness now dwells among us and fuels our transformative journeys.

This is the night, the holy night, when for one moment, when we realize the birth of love incarnate, when we open our hearts to a connectedness which is real and which is unexplainable, our differences are suspended. This is the night when for one moment we realize a Oneness which is here and yet to come. This is the night when we glimpse the hope and love and joy and peace we have been praying for and preaching about. This is the night which inspires us and assures us or reassures us of the chronologically longer time which continues as we prepare for the complete restoration of the world...the time which is not a moment but an eternity!

Tonight we know infinite possibility because we have met the divine infant. Tonight we know infinite possibility because we have witnessed God's creative ability to make all things new: especially our hearts. Tonight an angel and a star, which just may be the Holy Spirit dropping in, illuminate heaven and earth made one. Tonight we are home!

And so I pray that just as Mary and Joseph journeyed through an Advent which brought them to a stable where they found just enough to provide and protect for the holy birth, you too will find just enough to cultivate and cherish, that is the word tonight, cherish, the birth of Jesus, salvation, in your heart. May that manger of your heart, the stable of your body, and the warmth of your soul become the home for you, your loved ones, and the unity of the world.

May you know the manger in your heart where Christ dwells.  
May you Sleep this night with the Christ child in heavenly peace.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! Let's make a joyful noise! I invite you to stand and sing Hark The Herald Angels Sing! no.