

Meditation – “A Sacred Journey”
Scripture Readings: Isaiah 9:2, 6-7; Luke 2:1-14
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Our first reading today comes from Isaiah, chapter 9, verses 2, 6 and 7. This is perhaps one of the most familiar and beloved of Isaiah’s prophecies about Emmanuel. Emmanuel, for Christians, is Jesus of Nazareth. Today, Christians around the world, celebrate the miracle of "God with us," the miracle of God’s sacred journey joining us in our humanity.

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders,
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ Great will be his authority,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Amen.*

On this Holy day we turn to Luke’s account of that sacred journey: the humble birth of Emmanuel, God with us. Hear now, God’s Holy Word.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

⁸ Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!” Amen.

The title of the meditation: “A Sacred Journey”

The text: And she gave birth to her firstborn son... Luke 2:7

Let us pray. Holy and Loving God, thank you for entering and embracing our humanity in an unexpected and sacred journey on Christmas Day so many years ago. Amen.

Last night on Christmas Eve we were honored to welcome Dyana Afeseh, the lovely daughter of Mervice Alah Abung, a young accountant from Cameroon and deacon within our congregation. Dyana, now six months old, played the esteemed role of Baby Jesus. at six months old as our youngest pageant participant. Dyana had the esteemed role of playing Baby Jesus.

A human baby Jesus in our pageant, a long tradition at Westminster, is especially meaningful because it reminds us of the miracle and wonder of each new life. As a church family we share the joy of new parents in our midst and welcome their children with open arms. In many ways Mary, Jesus’ mother, unites a common human experience.

And yet, on another level, Mary’s role is uniquely hers in the Judeo-Christian story of a sacred journey. It is Mary who brings God’s son into the world. In her womb she carried the One we call *Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*.

This morning we are invited to reflect on Mary’s significance within the Christmas Story and how she has been viewed by the church through the years.

First, the Roman Catholic Tradition gave Mary a prominent place, elevating her above all women and giving her the privilege of sainthood. As tradition evolved the theory of the Immaculate Conception developed. The meaning of this is that Mary was also miraculously conceived and sinless from birth. This was theologically important for the church fathers because it assured that Jesus was sinless! How could a sinful human give birth to a perfect son? Over the years, the virgin Mary lost all resemblance of humanity.

If the Roman Catholic Church erred in elevating Mary too high, to a place above humanity, making her more of a demigod than a humble maiden; the Reformation in the sixteenth century erred in the other direction.

John Calvin, the Father of the Protestant Reformation, felt so strongly about discontinuing the practice of sainthood, he insisted on being buried in an unmarked grave. In the Reformed effort not to set anyone apart, except Christ, Mary’s role was diminished greatly giving her virtually no place in the Protestant tradition.

In both scenarios we lose sight of the theological significance of Mary’s role in the Christmas story-- Protestants, because we have overlooked her almost completely; and Roman Catholics because we have taken away her vulnerability and humanity, which is precisely why her presence is such cause for unexpected joy and hope.

As Christians, at the heart of our faith is the belief that Jesus was fully divine and fully human. This is what makes it possible for Christ to be our Savior and to bridge the gap between God and humanity. The miracle of Christmas is the unexpected and sacred journey of God into our humanity.

Our understanding of how this could be is explained in the Apostle's Creed. We believe in "Jesus Christ...who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." If the Holy Spirit makes Christ's divinity possible, it is Mary who makes Christ's humanity possible. It is Mary's blood and Mary's flesh that make Christ human.

However, Mary's theological significance is even greater than this. By choosing Mary, God has chosen what the world understands as ordinary and powerless to demonstrate the extraordinary and powerful love of God.

John Phillip Newell reflects on the meaning of the Christ-child. *The Christ-child is born of heaven and earth, of God and humanity, of time and eternity. Christ is not simply one or the other. Christ is both and Christ shows us that we are both, that the spiritual and the material are one, that heaven and earth intersect in us.*

Two millennia after the birth of Christ ordinary people are still making extraordinary differences in our world. The message of Christmas is that God continues to call ordinary human beings, men and women, to extraordinary tasks on our journeys, by placing us in the right place at the right time and asking us to do the right thing.

The unexpected joy of Christmas is not only that God has visited God's people in the fullness of time, on a sacred journey, but also, in this ordinary meeting, we have come face to face with an extraordinary love that gently and persistently calls us to do the right thing.

May the spirit of the Christ Child live in our hearts. By the grace of God, may we each make unexpected and sacred journeys into the new year. Amen.