

## Christmas Eve – Year C

For three weeks and a couple of days, we've been celebrating the season of Advent – that time of hope and expectation. We've talked about the words of the prophets, about how we are called to be today's prophets. We've talked about John's message of "repentance" - that call to turn, to change our perspective, to change how we look at the world and one another.

And now we find ourselves here – on this Eve of Christmas – celebrating the coming of the Christ into our world.

For the children, we celebrate this feast as the Birthday of Jesus... we sing lots of carols that paint an idyllic scene that we attempt to recreate in nativity sets and "live" nativities. And we do that because our guts tell us this feast is important. We create and repeat things that become tradition around this feast...the Christmas tree, colored and bright white lights to chase away the darkness of this desolate time of year, the bleak mid-winter, the moon of winter-time. We exchange gifts, some with more thought and care than others. We leave cookies and milk for Santa and put coins or bills in red buckets outside stores while a bell rings, and perhaps we even remember or watch for the millionth time a story that tells of a Wonderful Life, where "every time a bell rings, and angel gets its wings!"

We do all of this, I think, in our feeble attempts to give expression to what is in our gut. We try to express the truth planted deeply within us: Something momentous happened. Something momentous IS happening. And there is something momentous still to come. And the real truth that we seek to express is this: God has come, God is present, and God will continue to be present.

On Sunday – yesterday – we heard the Gospel story of Mary running in haste to see her cousin Elizabeth. Mary – who has just been told by an angel that she would miraculously conceive and bear Jesus – visiting her much older cousin Elizabeth, who was miraculously pregnant in her advanced age with John. And this is what we were told: "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit

and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." When Mary arrived and greeted her, Elizabeth saw, not a disgraced unwed teenager, but a woman with the very presence of God in her womb. "Blessed is the fruit of your womb." And the baby, the promise of God within Elizabeth, moved. Which came first for Elizabeth – her recognition of the Son of God present in Mary's womb, or the movement within her? Perhaps they are simultaneous, the movement within us and the recognition of God present...

Every time your heart moves inside you when you see a little child's eyes bright with wonder at their first awareness of Christmas – no, not just when you see and smile, but when you *let your heart be moved* – that is God breaking into the world, God breaking into *your* world. When I skimmed through Facebook posts the other day and stopped to watch the story of the young boy who uses his allowance to make and distribute sandwiches to the homeless, and when I was present enough to that story to *let my heart be moved*, that was God breaking in. That was God saying, "This is what the realm, the way of God looks like."

A couple of weeks ago, I went to my first meeting of the Diocesan Commission on Ministry. It was a Christmasy gathering in one of the members' home. A fireplace was burning on the big screen TV, music was playing in the background. We shared wonderful food. And then we shared our answers to three questions: What makes us most happy; what breaks our hearts; and what do we bring to the group. It took a long time, the sharing. People shared from a deep place. And in some graced moment, I saw that what was happening was indeed Eucharist – Christ present in that sharing of our food and our lives. God taking flesh in that moment.

Yes, God took flesh in Jesus, whether in a manger or cave, with angels or shepherds or not. God came. We've got that part of the story down. But we keep sharing it, because our hearts know the rest of the story. Our hearts know the more inexpressible mystery: that God is incarnate, *is* present now. Our task is to let our hearts be moved, to let our eyes see, to let ourselves know and believe.

When you look around the table as you share Christmas dinner with your family or friends, open your eyes to see the wonder of Love present there; pause, and allow your heart to be moved, really moved – and you will see, too, the presence of God in your midst. And if you look around the table and see an empty chair, and your heart is moved almost to tears, know that your heart moves then, too, because of Love - and that Love is still present. Your heart knows. That is God, too, breaking into your world.

We heard Isaiah say:

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.

It has. And it does. And it will. We have only to open our eyes and let our hearts be moved.

A blessed Christmas to all.

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