

“Christmas Eve Meditations”

Luke 2:1-20 & 28 & Titus 2:11-14

Pastor James York

December 24, 2021

Prayer for Illumination

Author God, Scripture tells us that when Jesus taught in the temple, all who heard were amazed. We want to be amazed too. We want to hear your word with new ears. We want to be unraveled and transformed by the truth tucked between those sentences. We want to be opened up by the hope in these holy pages. We want to be amazed. So as we read today, transport us to those early days in the temple. Open our hearts so we can hear your word like never before. We are listening. We are grateful. Amen.

Scripture: Luke 2:1-7

Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus: In those days, a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. 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. Joseph went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 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 for them in the inn.

Meditation

God always provides a way home. Tonight, we celebrate that God is with us. The joy of angels singing, the love of God in Jesus, the peace of equality for kings, shepherds and all people, the wonder of worship, the majesty of life on a starry night, the warm glow of candlelight, the waters of baptism, the nourishment of God, the drink of promised eternal life all give us glimpses of home. Jesus promises that one day he will personally carry us to our heavenly home. Surely, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Even when it appears there is no room, no invitations, no home, all is in chaos, God always provides a way home. Bethlehem was bursting with people from the census. No room at the Inn. Mary’s and Joseph’s families were shunning them for their unwed pregnancy. No room with family. Mary and Joseph forced to travel for the censuses are far from their physical home. No time for them to travel home. And yet someone invited Mary and Joseph to the stable and made a home for them there. Someone got them food and water and the necessities to birth a child. Someone made more room for shepherds to celebrate the birth.

God does not need grand invitations, luxury accommodations or prepared hosts. God delights in being welcomed into the simplest heart, the most sinful life and inhospitable person. Just unlock the door to your heart and God will come in and transform you making all glorious. Jesus said, “Behold I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to them and eat with them and they with me.” In many ways, Jesus is born without an invitation; and yet, he devotes his life to inviting people who are cast out. In the same way, we might imagine the story of Christmas as God’s invitation to be welcomed home despite all barriers.

Christmas reminds us that even if no one welcomes us home, we are rejected, we are homeless, God will find a way into our lives and make a way for us to come home to God’s eternal, abundant, joyful love. No one will be abandoned by God. No one is orphaned from God’s family. No one is ever separated from God’s love. We celebrate Immanuel, God with us. We celebrate that each of us belongs to God’s family. We celebrate God’s love. We celebrate that we have an eternal home. This is good news of great joy for all people.

Are we looking for home in our desires to be welcomed in? Perhaps the door to be opened with cheers of, “You are here!” Maybe the clerk at the store to ask how we are doing, and the waiter to wink at us and whisper, “Good choice.” Perhaps how we enjoy when someone learns our name and takes time to get to know us. Maybe how we delight in being invited to enjoy a meal in which the host prepared our favorite food just the way we enjoy it. Are we looking for a form of home when we want a stranger to help us pick up the groceries we dropped, or a fellow traveler to make room for us to have a seat? Is a form of home a smile, a hug, a phone call? At the end of the day we are all just a collection of heart and bones walking through this world, exchanging invitations, saying to one another in a million little ways—come matter here. Come make a difference here. Come be you, here.

Come home. Jesus didn't receive much of an invitation. Still, Jesus came. Jesus is with us now. What a gift it is to have a God who does not wait on our invitation. What a gift it is to have a God who can't imagine being anywhere but here with you. What a gift to have a God who sees you fully perfected, all your goodness fully manifest. What a gift to have a God who chooses from all the places in the cosmos to make God's home in your heart, to make your soul a temple for the Holy Spirit, to dwell and shine and bless you and bless the world. Tonight, we celebrate that everyone has a home. Amen

We continue Luke's account of the Christmas Story

Scripture: Luke 2:8-20

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 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!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying, and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Scripture: A reading from the Apostle Paul's letter to Titus and us:

Titus 2:11, 13-14 NLT "For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. We look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. Jesus gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us God's very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds."

Meditation

Until we are all welcomed home God provides grace to forgive, transform, invigorate, and perfect us.

The angel appeared to Mary and said, **Luke 1:28 DRA "Hail Mary, full of grace."** Grace the one thing you cannot earn. It seems to me that grace is the only free gift in the cosmos. Everything else needs to be earned, accepted, or perceived. Everything else involves trying harder which makes us tired, instead of setting us free. The angel did not say, "Hail Mary full of goodness, or virtue, or morals, or good works, or status, or money, or faith." The angel said, "Hail Mary, full of grace." Jesus came to reveal grace.

Grace is lavishly given to all without any consideration of the worthiness of the recipient. Grace is given unconditional because God is ever expanding love, joy, and peace. Grace is given freely because God delights in you, and all people. Grace is given to transform everyone and everything into perfect eternal goodness. Grace enables us to repent, to turn from life diminishing ways, to turn to life enhancing ways. Grace is given to provide a way home.

The Greek word for "grace" is the same word used for "gift." Jesus, God's gift to us, is grace in human flesh. All of us will be transformed by grace. Celebrating grace speeds up the transformation process and fills us with more peace, love, and joy on our journey home. Grace helps us let go of every mistake, pain, tear, regret, fear, and hate and let come God's every expanding goodness. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: **Titus 2:11-14 MSG "God's readiness to give and forgive is now public. Salvation is available for everyone! We are being shown how to turn our backs on a godless, indulgent life, and how to take on a God-filled, God-honoring life. This new life is starting right now and is whetting our appetites for the glorious day when our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, appears. Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice to free us from a dark, rebellious life into this good, pure life, making us a people God can be proud of, energetic in goodness."**

As you savor more and more grace your eager anticipation flourishes glimpsing the infinite grace, love, joy, peace, goodness, and blessings God will give you and everyone.

Cynthia Rigby wrote: "In an economically precarious world in which we are frequently reminded that no one is irreplaceable, the reality of God's grace reassures and transforms us. To move through one's days with a realization that one is saved by grace and grace alone takes attention and practice. It also takes the support of a community. To become increasingly mindful of our unalterable identity as children of God who have a glorious eternal home. When we know we are God's beloved, irreplaceable children, we are able not only to survive a world that is relentlessly

measuring our worth, but we can also work to change this world into one that more clearly manifests grace, a home for all. We can, more and more, come to see others also as irreplaceable, treating them accordingly, living differently together as members of the beloved family of God.”

Richard Rohr wrote: “Love is not something you do; love is something you are. Love is your True Self. Love is where you came from, and love is where you are going. Love is not something you can buy. Love is not something you can attain. Love is the presence of God within you, called the Holy Spirit or what some theologians name uncreated grace. You can’t manufacture this by any right conduct. You can’t make God love you one ounce more than God already loves you right now. You can go to church every day for the rest of your life. God is not going to love you any more than God loves you right now. You cannot make God love you any less, either—not an ounce less. Do the most terrible thing and God would not love you less. You cannot change the Divine mind about you! The flow is constant, total, and 100 percent toward your life. God is for you. We can’t diminish God’s love for us. What we can do, however, is learn how to believe love, receive love, trust love, allow love, and celebrate love, accepting Trinity’s whirling invitation to join in the cosmic dance.”

Relax, let go, let come, celebrate grace. Allow the grace of God to flow through you, to give you wings so you shine with grace revealing the way home for those who are still searching for home. Tonight, we celebrate the revealing of the grace of God through Jesus. We celebrate that everyone is on their way home. Amen