

Christmas Day, 2019 (Jn 1:1-14; Is 52:7-10; Titus 3:4-7; Ps 97)

When I was in Confirmation, ages ago, I learned a definition of prayer that has stuck with me: *Prayer is the conversation of a believing heart with God.* “Conversation” is a two-way street. It’s easy for us to ask God for what we want—it’s a lot harder to listen to *God’s* requests to *us*.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes, author of my daily on-line devotional, writes these words, from God to us at Christmas:

Dearly Beloved, my Word is made flesh. This is how I live. I am born not once long ago, but each moment, always. Will you be my flesh? I have none of my own—can I put you on and wear you into the world? Will you be born for me? -- Walk in the woods for me, will you? Touch what you can touch for me, touch with gentle fingers. Listen for me. Hear so that I may hear. Inhale the scents of pine and sage, babies and cities. Look with my eyes. See what I long to see, one thing at a time.

Be with the lonely for me, will you? Stay close to the suffering, dance with the joyful. Let your heart be broken as you reach out to the despised. Notice the beauty. Dare to be a child in a rough world. This is how I come.

You are my flesh now, dear one. Bear me into this world, for I will always be in you and in all you meet. Watch for those who don’t know this, and see me in them even when they can’t. – Look now, I am coming close, seeking the manger. Even now I enter (Steve Garnaas-Holmes, *Unfolding Light*, 12/23/15). (end quote)

Remember the gospel, the *good news* according to John: **and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth.** –The Christmas stories in the Bible are just that: *stories*. They’re visions, dreams, and memories both *reported* and *recorded* to help us humble human beings grasp the immense, enormous, almighty and everlasting love and power of our God. They tell a truth that speaks to the hearts and minds and lives of people who pay attention.

The Word became flesh and dwelt *among* us. In our midst. *Between* us. *Within* us. God dwells inside every single person he created and loved into being. The saddest thing in all of creation is that so many people don't know he's inside them. Most of them don't even know anything *about* God.

Another sad thing is that in the crazy busy-ness leading up to Christmas, the whole meaning of it gets lost. Christian traditions have made it rather crowded around the manger. Most nativity scenes show a wooden feeding trough. In all likelihood, though, Jesus was born in a *cave* rather than a wooden stable; but as long as nativity scenes have been made, they've represented what stables look like in more modern times, and in northern, less rocky places without so many caves.

And our manger scenes usually have sheep and cows and a donkey—though the Bible doesn't say that Mary rode a donkey, and Luke, in his Christmas Eve gospel, doesn't mention any animals at all. As for the angels, Luke left them up on the hillside. According to his birth story of Jesus, they weren't anywhere near the stable.

And the "wise men"? That's a legitimate translation of an old Aramaic or Hebrew word meaning "astrologer" or "star-gazer." Somehow they morphed into "three kings," though scripture doesn't say they were rulers, or that there were three of them. And to thoroughly confuse you, I have to say (that) they didn't arrive in Bethlehem until *much* later, probably when Jesus was a couple of years old.

With our nativity scenes and mental images so crowded, it's hard for us to imagine *ourselves* in the picture at all. But that's where we need to be. What we really need is the *baby*, Baby Jesus who came to save us. In the cluttered creches he can't get close to us, and he can't become our Savior. Just as there was no room at the inn in Bethlehem, there's no room in our minds, or hearts, or lives for God, who made himself small enough to be born so he could be one of us. God who took on our humanity so we could share in his divinity.

This baby Jesus won't bring you your heart's desire under the Christmas tree. (By the way, there are no fir trees in Bethlehem.) But if you let him, he *will* bring you a sense of God's nearness and love for you that will never end, and a promise of meaning for your life in this world. And that's something no Christmas *story* can ever do. Only the Christ child can do that.

So, people of God, and people *hungry* for God, Go!

- Go tell it on the mountain, over the hill and everywhere!
- Go tell it in your family gatherings, and at your Superbowl party.
- Go tell it to your colleagues at work, and your class mates at school.
- Go tell it to your neighbor who's searching for meaning in life, and to your acquaintance who's going through a divorce.
- Go tell it to the homeless person as you offer her a cup of coffee, and to the cancer patient dying in the hospital.
- Go tell it to the crabby clerk at the retail stores, and the angry teenager hanging out in the park.
- Go tell it to yourself in the valleys and the dark places of your life.

Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hill and everywhere! Go, tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!

Thanks be to God!