

Christmas Day – God’s defiant assertion of hope

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Christmas Day 2024 – Luke 2:1-20

Come rain, hail, shine, heatwave or flood, babies will be born. They’re not going to stop for anyone or anything. It’s as if they’re telling us: Here I come, ready or not. If you don’t think you have that world outside ready for me, now’s the time! So let me place that order once more. When I get out, I need one promising future, one safe environment, lots of good food and one loving community. Got all that?! Now you’ve got fifteen minutes to get it organised, ‘cause here I come!”

It’s shocking so many babies don’t get those good things. We could despair at it all; tell ourselves there’s nothing we can do about it. But the birth of Jesus, born as one of a subject people in a land under military occupation tells us to think differently. Christmas demands that we change our perspective. Christmas calls us to see the birth of a child as a defiant word from God: a defiant assertion of hope where we fear to hope; a defiant assertion of trust in humanity, even where we’re afraid to trust; and a defiant assertion of love, even where we’ve come to fear that love won’t really change anything. Christmas demands that we change our perspective.

Every baby is a word of hope that God speaks to the world; a word of trust that God speaks to the world. And a baby is patently someone that God loves. We might fear that nothing’s changed. We might feel like giving up. But God won’t. Just as the sun shines and the rain falls on everyone alike, God sends babies to be born to us regardless of our circumstances. We might focus on the tragedy of a birth in a refugee camp or a

war zone. We might ask God why this is allowed to happen. But the only answer we get to that question is more babies. A most eloquent answer.

Isn't God paying attention? Maybe not, because God is busy being with the baby as it's born. People often ask where God is when all the catastrophes and suffering of the world are allowed to happen. That birth of a refugee baby is God's answer. This baby's birth tells us that God is right in the thick of the world's catastrophes and suffering; God is there, crying with all the defiant self-righteousness of every baby that ever had the right to be embraced and comforted in a peaceful, loving place.

Bethlehem's baby tells us that God will never listen to pragmatists. God is too busy trusting us; trusting us to care for the vulnerable and the weak. God is so determined that we'll come good that God becomes one of us. God becomes that vulnerable baby Jesus and through him, reminds us to work for a world that's fit for any baby!

In a world where so many millions of infants are born in such conditions as Jesus was, we can hear in his story a story which changes our perspective on all of them, and brings a word of hope? Where is God? Today, God meets us, born as a human child.

God is born in the infant Jesus. His birth is a defiant word which confronts things that we seem to accept as inevitable for ourselves and many of our fellow creatures. The baby Jesus confronts the fact that we live in a world plagued with poverty and hunger, oppression and warfare, genocide and environmental destruction. We hear world leaders – we hear our own leaders – talking of these evils as though they are somehow inevitable. We sometimes even get told that it might hurt our national interest too much if we were to confront these evils frankly for what they are.

This baby, and through him every baby, is God's word of truth to us that such evils are not inevitable. They can be confronted. And not with fearful caution, but with the reckless kind of determined hope that sends a baby to be born in a land under military occupation. The birth of Jesus under such conditions calls us urgently to confront the evils and injustices of our world. Because every baby's birthright is to receive the love of God through the nurture of others; not to suffer and die at the whim of some alien, anonymous power. Every child, every animal or bird or reptile that is born, every plant that grows is a word from God which says what can be. We were each born to be a sign of God's love, hope and truth. Our divine birthright is to make this real through the respect and love we afford all God's creatures.

The golden flame of the Christ Candle at the centre of the Advent Wreath – the tiny beacon we've been waiting to see – it's a symbol of hope which defies despair. It's a sign of trust which God has cherished for each of us as babies, and still cherishes for us now. Today, we have shared this light of hope, of trust and love. We've read and sung its story. And today when we go out, we're commissioned to do so with the purpose of carrying this light of hope, trust and love to God's world.

This baby is God's defiant assertion of hope where we see none. This baby is God's assertion that trust will live even where deception protects injustice. This baby is the Word of God's love spoken to each of us, calling us love each other. In Christ's birth, God became one of us, and reminds us that every atom of creation is charged with the divine hope, trust and love that God reposes in us. So where is God? Here in us. That's what we discover anew as we greet the Christ child today. Amen