

## God is Still Speaking through Christmas

Luke 2:1-20

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When I typed the words “God is still speaking through Christmas” at the top of the page for this meditation, I had a gut reaction that it wasn’t true! The Christmas we celebrate in December (and increasingly in November and even October) has become so covered over in tinsel and greed that it’s easy to forget what this was originally about and hear God’s voice in it. Indeed, in many places, it is not a religious holiday at all anymore; though only a tiny percent of Japanese are Christian (about 1%), Christmas has become a huge holiday there.

How can God’s voice cut through all that?

How desperately we need God’s voice to cut through all that.

So, today we are pulling Christmas out of its worldly context and back into a faith context, an event of the Spirit rather than of commerce. What is this thing all about, stripped of buying gifts and hearing endless repetitions of Christmas music on speakers everywhere, stripped of all those Hallmark channel movies, stripped of “It’s a Wonderful Life” and “Elf?”

In the immortal words of Linus, “I’ll tell you what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.”

You heard the story already. There’s an even shorter summary of what Christmas is all about in a little-known hymn we are singing today. The refrain of hymn 153 is “God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day.”

Christmas is the holy surprise of God re-consecrating the human body by coming to us in one. The surprise that all of our bodies in all their variety, and not just the disembodied spirits in us, are valuable and beautiful and useful in the service of God.

Christmas is the holy surprise that God had not given up on human beings but wanted to come in person to try to get us to live in such a way

that we would be at peace with one another and at peace within ourselves. That way is still there for us to follow.

Christmas is the holy surprise that God came in weakness and not in strength, in a slow-growing deep love and not a harsh punishment or tyrannical crackdown.

Christmas is the holy surprise that God came to us as part of a family that had no power or status or wealth and invited angels to proclaim the news first to those who had even less of those things; and the surprise is that God continues to come to such as Mary and Joseph and the shepherds.

Christmas is the holy surprise that God does not want us to live in fear but in deep joy, the kind of joy that comes from knowing that we are loved in an outrageous way by a God who knows what it's like to be us.

Christmas is the holy surprise that as we remember it once a year, we know that the veil between earth and heaven once was pulled back, and that by the power of the Spirit, we still can reach out and have our hand met by God's love, which is accessible to us always. As a friend of mine said when we were in the shepherd's fields in Bethlehem, Palestine, "There is hope in knowing angels once came here."

I am a Christian because of Christmas. Not the decorations or the presents or even the music. I am a Christian because I am so amazed that God would do this, that God loves us this much. I am a Christian because I believe that if God did this for us, you and I have the foundation and the power to do what the grown-up Jesus asked, and love other people the way we have been loved by God in Jesus.

We need Christmas in July because we need to raise our voices again in the story. That cruel rulers were in charge of the world, but God came in under their radar to say that cruelty and fear-mongering are wrong. Don't be afraid. On earth peace. Glory to God, to **God**, and none other. We need Christmas to remind ourselves that these bodies, made holy by Jesus, have the capacity to resist the hate of the world with outrageous love.

To all who will happily chant that we need to keep Christ in Christmas while at the same time spewing hate, I say that the way to keep Christ in Christmas is to live in love as Christ loved us. Just saying "Merry Christmas"

instead of “Happy Holidays” does not make one faithful. Because what we are rejoicing in, the reason we are “merry” is, in a paraphrase of the words of Mary:

God has looked with favor on a young, olive-skinned, Jewish woman who is now forever called blessed, and for whom God has done marvelous things.

God comes bringing mercy for generations to come as they remember this story.

God has shown strength by scattering the proud and their perverse thinking. God has brought down the powerful and lifted up the lowly. God fills the hungry with good things, not turning them away to die in the desert. God has sent the rich away empty.

God remembers promises made to our ancestors and wants to be in that loving relationship with us as well.

That's what makes us merry, believing the now but not yet of the promise of the kingdom of God being near.

Oh friends, be merry. Even in 100-degree weather! God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day. And every day. Merry Christmas! Amen.