

Reflection

December 24<sup>th</sup> 7pm

Luke 2: 1-14

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Title: Worth it.

Prayer: Holy One, we open our hearts to you and pray that your deep call for each of us will fill and fuel us on the path that leads us all to love. Amen.

“Do not be afraid” the angels say.

“You’re worth it” God says.

Not in so many words, but this story – this story of God being born into the world in human form in a manger to unwed, unknown and unwealthy parents; and the birth being announced to smelly shepherds in a field sleeping with their sheep, and they being tasked as the first ones to share the news of the birth – this story tells us in no uncertain terms that we are worth it.

We are worthy of God’s love, we are seen and known and loved by God. We are worth it to the Creator of all creation to journey with us in this world in human flesh that gets loved and broken, damaged and healed, outcast and redeemed, challenged and comforted over and over and over again.

We are worthy of this kind of love – the love that is so all consuming it would enter the world in human flesh to dwell with us. All of us are worth it. Each and every one of us, the whole world over and all of creation. The person on either side of you right now, those in front and behind you. And you. All of us are treasured children of God.

And why is this important to hear tonight?

Because so much of what we hear and experience going on in the world right now might make us wonder if we’ve been forgotten, left on our own to figure this out. There are world conflicts, there is housing and food scarcity, there are mass shootings, there is political manipulation, there is a rise in racism. And, for some of us there are struggles with finances, aging parents, safety of a loved one, job loss, faltering relationships. We can feel like we are on our own. We can feel forgotten.

We can blame our leaders, we can blame the system, we can grow apathetic or disillusioned and start to believe there’s nothing we can do and no influence we can have anyway, so why try anymore.

So, isn't it interesting to note in this story tonight that the angels didn't come to the powerful emperor or governor that Julia read about; the message of "God with us" came to the smelly shepherds, that Ken read about, sleeping in the field with their sheep who had no power to speak of.

God came to the negligible, not the grand.

God came to the humble, not the regal.

God came to the ones not in charge.

During Advent here at Highlands we've been focusing on waking up to the spiritual realities of the season – waking up to Hope, Peace, Joy and Love no matter what is going on in our lives and in the world.

On Hope Sunday we learned that Hope was not some innocent, simple feeling but a street fighter with dirt on her face and blood on her knuckles ready to go another round with the despair and apathy surfacing in broken hearts today.

We learned that peace is not just a passive longing for experience but something we play an active role in ushering in. Each one of us is powerful enough, influential enough and strong enough to live and act from a place of peace in our hearts, despite the conflict that may surround us.

We learned that Joy is not happiness but a grounding, fuelling energy that surprises us and sustains us through some of our moments of greatest suffering.

And we learned that Love is fostered and shared and built only when we can be vulnerable. We let our guard down first. We take that risky step of not knowing the outcome before we begin, and we love without any guarantee of return.

We don't wait for someone else to create hope, peace, joy and love. We do it. With God's help. With God's abiding presence.

In our Christmas story, Mary and Joseph returned to Joseph's hometown. "While they were there" it came time for Mary to give birth. So, we might imagine they had been back for a while; maybe Joseph had visited with some old friends or relatives, and maybe Mary and Joseph had had a chance to catch their breath.

It was 9 months prior that the Angel Gabriel had come to Mary telling her she'd be giving birth to a son who would be great, would be called the Son of the Most High, and to name him Jesus. At that time Mary had said to the angel "Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

Well, the time had come. Mary was now to give birth to the Son of the Most High.

And, in the same region, in some field, in the dark of night, more angels of the Lord burst forth on the shepherds bringing news of this birth. Let's remember, there was no newspaper article or BlueSky post saying "Three weeks from now the Saviour will be born." Those shepherds would have been

completely surprised. Rubbing their eyes, trying to get their brains in gear, 'huh' 'wha' 'the messiah' what?' And then as quick as the angels were there they were gone and it was the dark of night again.

The shepherds decide to go see, and then they do see, and they can't help but make known what had happened. People were amazed.

We hear this story every year. Oh yeah, the manger, the shepherds, yeah yeah yeah, I remember this, we say to ourselves.

Mary's life changed by the appearance of the angel Gabriel.

The Shepherds lives changed by the appearance of the heavenly host.

How will our lives change by the appearance of the birth of Jesus?

This year, right now, can we choose to be taken out of the regularity of our lives and experience the inbreaking of the Holy into the world? Can we believe that we are worth that kind of effort?

If we can believe that we are worth it, that we are worthy of this extraordinary, ongoing, abiding, ever present love that will not let us go, then we can be the agents of hope, peace, joy and love the world so desperately needs right now.

We can say as Mary said ... "here I am, use me to share your love." We can be vessels for God's love; we can be active in spreading the hope, peace, joy and love that the world always needs, just by telling this story. Over and over and over again.

Let's be like the shepherds and spread the news that God's love has been born anew into the world this night and that it can actually change the world.

It really can.

And it did. It does. It will.

How?

By us believing that God's love lives in us, and in all of creation. That every person, every tree, every mouse, every river holds the power and love of God. When we truly believe this then the reign of peace is possible.

"Do not be afraid" the angels say.

"You're worth it" God says.

May it be so.

Amen.