

Trinity Church in the City of Boston
Christmas Day, 2023

Christmas Day I

[Isaiah 9:2-7](#)

[Titus 2:11-14](#)

[Luke 2: 15-20](#)

O God, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our Judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Christ to thee with God the father, and O Holy Ghost to thee, hymn an chant and high thanksgiving, and unwearied praises be; honor, glory, and dominion, and eternal victory evermore and evermore. Amen.

Well, MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Froliche Weihnachten, Joyeux Noel, and Feliz Navidad.

In German, French, Spanish and English- our greeting today and for the next 12 days expresses joy, happiness, and merriment about today, the day that Jesus was born. Navidad means nativity, Noel comes from the old French and latin for nativity, Weihnachten literally means “holy night” and Christmas- well, even in English it is clear who and what we are talking about. No matter in which how you say it, our Christmas greeting expresses JOY about the birth of Jesus.

And what a Holy night it was, filled with unlikely pairings in unlikely places. Mary, the god-bearer, with no where to rest, God made flesh in the form of a vulnerable baby, this newborn king’s first visitors were smelly shepherds who came in with their flock in tow. And then there were Angels. Heavenly hosts with awe striking news, songs from the realms of glory..... what an incredible gathering of all of humanity. I wonder what sorts of conversations took place? Could they even find words to say?

Many of you know that I do not have any biological children of

my own. AS it was said in *Gone with the Wind*, “I don’t know nothing about birthing no babies” and yet many years ago this is exactly what I found myself doing. As a peace corps volunteer in tiny village called Yendemillimou (no spell check does not like the spelling of this word).....I found myself working alongside of two incredible sagefemme or midwives- though I do like the literal translation from French which is “wise women”..... Susan was a refugee from Sierre Leone and spoke pigeon English and a dialect called Malinke and Fatima was from Guinea and spoke incredible French and the same dialect, Malinke.

Communication was tricky with these two. In order to share a story with these two wonderful women, I first told the story to Susan in English and then I would turn to Fatima and tell the same story but in French. Or Susan would translate the story into Malinke. Either way one of us would wait...listening to the other translation...watching for the same emotions we had when we first heard the story.....and usually the story ended in laughter because of my mishaps in a foreign land.

Every third night, we three spent the night at the health clinic and were on duty for birthing babies. Women would arrive in the quiet of night seeking the skills of these women as they delivered their babies. My friends would gently wake me up and I became “flashlight girl”... in a health center where there was no running water or electricity. My 4 Dcell battery MAG light was far better than the kerosene lantern. And here I was the western woman who towered over my colleagues by a good foot in height- but I was not the sage femme. I knew very little and learned so much. In the quiet of the night, I witnessed my first birth....none of the words were familiar to me- dialect was being used for speed and conversation between the young mother and the mid-wives. And Yet there was trust there, I did not need to know the words- these women knew what they were doing.

And boy was I not prepared for the visible pain of the mother- the hard work, the labor and time., Nor was I prepared for the messiness of birth- there is a lot of things they don't tell you when you are growing up about all of that. And I was not prepared for the custom of this region when the baby was born.

I was soooo excited to see the outcome of all this effort that I started to talk, asking the questions I was dying to ask and I was immediately shushed.... the custom in this culture was to not say a word until that newborn made the first sound.... here we stood, midwives, mother, all holding our breath until this little newborn gasped and squealed on its own... and then... then we danced, we sang and squealed in joy too.

We were an unlikely group of people, a Sierra Leonean, Guinean, First time mother, and Southern white-woman with a flashlight and found ourselves covered in the messiness of birth and bound together by the universal gift of breath and laughter. Unlikely people in unlikely places, helping to bring new life into this world.

Today our readings speak of birth and new life. We hear of a new beginning coming, 2 chapters later we will hear the familiar words of Isaiah, “For a child has been born to us... Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace.....” the same hope for freedom is expressed in the baby lying in the manger in Bethlehem. A new thing, a new life and while the

continuation of the same love of God, a new thing.

In the ordinary, God takes human form and lives with us.

Emmanuel, God with us.

Throughout scripture we hear the message of God's love for God's people. Each prophet translates the message into their context and then here in a manger, God comes down to tell that message in and through Jesus. A baby who in the very beginning has no words but grow into the man who tells us how to live, how to love, how to better understand who God is. Living with us through the pains and messiness of life, Jesus gives us new breath and laughing and dancing with us in the delight of new life.

Even when we do not have the words, God provides comfort and new way.

Today the birth story is told again in our Gospel reading....for the first time.

Angels share the message with the Shepherds. In words and

language and presence that the Shepherds understand. Angels, celestial bodies of the heavenly realm- close to God- share the news with those who are in the field- working while others sleep... tending livestock. Shepherding was an Essential but by no means a heavenly occupation. And they receive the same joy as if it were priests or kings who had been visited that night.

God is with them, right then and right there --- and they spring into action....with haste they go to see the baby Jesus. Unlikely people in unlikely places receiving news of great joy.

And the story has been told over and over and over again. For over 2000 years we tell this story. We may not understand all of the words all of the time, we may identify with different portions of the nativity at different moments in our lives, but one thing is sure..... god is with us.

In our messiness, our grief, our brokenness, and in our joy, God is there and will triumph over this broken world.

We, too, are called to be midwives, sharing this story with all who

are around us, using words that others might understand. Words that shed light in the midst of a world so desperate for unquenchable hope and joy. Sometimes our task is messy, sometimes we will have to wait anxiously, sometimes we will need someone else (even the most unlikely of folks) to hold the flashlight for us to show the light.....the light for new birth and new hope.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity.
Pleased as man with us to dwell; Jesus our Emmanuel.

Merry Christmas indeed, my friends.

Amen.