

***A Night to Remember***  
December 24, 2013 – Christmas Eve  
Isaiah 9: 2-7  
Luke 2:1-20  
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## **I. Introduction**

“And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world was to be taxed.” Those words are Luke’s invitation to remember that miraculous night so many, many years ago when a ragged family camped out in a stable and the Messiah was born. Throughout the Sundays this Advent, we had been following Mary along her journey to Bethlehem and learning from her some of how we come to this place to sit or stand in awe of the Messiah from that first inconceivable message of the angel to this moment when it all comes together.

## **II. Birthing**

I only experienced the birth of my own two children secondhand which is the best that a father gets to do. But from observing the process fairly up close, I can tell you it’s a really, really painful one. And while she couldn’t convey how painful it was, Jeannine certainly tried to share some of that pain with me by standing on my feet every time she had a contraction and conveying at least some of what was going on in her body. It was a loud, messy, painful process. And frankly, I’m not sure that if there had been a multitude of the heavenly hosts singing there, that I would have noticed them particularly. And we had it easy compared to Mary who is in a dark, dank cave used as a stable, in a town that she doesn’t know, surrounded by people she doesn’t know and animals. And in the midst of all this chaos, this troop of shepherds marches in to tell

everyone about the band of angels that they have seen. And then Luke closes the story with these very interesting words, “Mary stored up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

### **III. Incarnation**

“Pondering” is not a word that comes to mind in the midst of a birth, and yet, it’s a wonderful word for us because that’s why we’re here tonight, to remember and to ponder. In the midst of the chaos that is the Christmas season for each of us, we have come to these few moments to take a deep breath and let all of the chaos slide away and to ponder this inconceivable mystery that is this night.

I wonder if part of Mary’s pondering was, for lack of a better term, theological. She’s just given birth and she’s just heard these strangers come and tell her of a vision of angels, and I assume that part of her pondering has got to be, what does it mean for the creator of the cosmos to become flesh and live in the midst of us? What does it mean to hold in tension this incredible paradox of complete and utter power and complete and utter powerlessness? How does the one become the other?

On the eve of World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer preached in a Christmas Eve sermon, “Where is the might of divinity in a child?” And then, he answered his own question saying, “In the divine love in which He became like us. His poverty in the manger is His might. In the might of love, He overcame the chasm between God and humankind. God’s power is made most manifest in this supreme act of love by which all of the barriers that we have placed between ourselves and our creator are broken down and God chooses to experience everything that we experience, to be with us in every way conceivable.”

And then, of course, I wonder if Mary also pondered what that meant for her, what does it mean to give birth to the divine? How do you raise and nurture the Holy One? How do you parent God?

That's a question that Mary offers each of us, because the incarnation didn't happen just once. It happens every single time one of us chooses to allow the word to be given birth in our lives. It happens every single time we choose to become vessels of God's grace in the world. We are invited this night, this moment, to allow ourselves to give birth to God's promise for the world in every relationship, every time we interact with someone, every word of hope, every work on behalf of justice. Each of those places we give birth to God's Word and Will for the world, we become vessels of God's love.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Pastor and author Eugene Peterson writes, "Once a year each Christmas, we and millions of our neighbors turn aside from our preoccupations with life that is reduced to biology or economics or psychology and join together in a community of wonder. The wonder keeps us open-eyed, expectant, alive to life that is always more than we can account for, that always exceeds our calculations, that is always beyond anything we can make."

And so, we gather tonight expectant, waiting, remembering that that child of such vulnerability born in Bethlehem at the whim of the world's only super power was the way in which God transformed the world, that paradoxically the enormous power of the Roman Empire today lies in dust and the work that God did through that fragile baby

continues to transform the life of the world every single time that we say, "Let it be to me according to Your will."

Amen.