

Nine Months Later... Ready or Not!

By: Meagan McLaughlin

December 24, 2020. On this Christmas Eve, God comes to us not in the big things, but in the smallest of the particulars.

Reading: [Luke 2:1-20](#)

*** Transcript ***

Nine months ago we took, as Bishop Candeia suggested, a pause in gathering in person. The pause grew, and we celebrated Easter and then Pentecost on Zoom. We have celebrated baptism, and communion, and funerals. We have continued to adapt as summer moved to fall, and Advent began. And here we are, nine months later, greeting anew the birth of God in the flesh, ready or not. Whether the tree is trimmed, or not. Whether the presents are bought and wrapped, or not. Whether the food is ready, or not. Whether the house is clean, or not. Whether our church building is open, or not.

And that is quite fitting, really. Because when you think about it, how ready could Mary and Joseph have been to welcome this new babe, when they were many miles from home, having barely finished a long and exhausting journey before Mary goes into labor, only to find out that somehow or other, their reservation at the inn must have gotten lost? And yet, the labor continued, somehow they found a place to stay, and Jesus is born. Ready or not.

And yes, the angels sang, and the wise people are on their way, following the star — that amazing light in the sky that is marking the place where God has just broken into the world. But inside the stable, what you see when you look in the door is Jesus lying in the manger, Mary resting, and Joseph keeping watch. Nothing there gives any indication that the whole world is about to be transformed.

The world Jesus is born into — under Roman governors and emperors, and puppet religious leaders appointed by Rome — is about to be turned upside down. But in an ironic sort of way, most people have no idea what has taken place. Jesus was born to parents whose job is to follow directions, present themselves where they're told, for Joseph and Mary to work as hard as they can to support the growing family, to care for and protect their child from all the dangers that may present themselves as Jesus gets older. There is nothing remarkable, as you peek in the windows, about this family. And yet, it is *this* family to whom Jesus is born.

And the first people to hear that news, that the promise of God to bring justice and healing and redemption to this broken world is being fulfilled, are not the wealthy wise people, or the emperor, or the high priest, but the shepherds in the fields. The shepherds were not ready, either. While the rest of the world was following the order to go and be counted, they were in the fields, watching their sheep, almost oblivious to the chaos around them. They were people without a home or a family heritage, or money. They were, in the eyes of the emperor, not worth counting in the census, not worth sending soldiers to usher them to comply with the law. And it is to them, these herders of sheep without a name or a country, that the angel first announces the good news to all the people. It is for them the angel came, and the heavenly hosts sang. And they were the first to go to the place where Jesus lay to see for themselves what God was doing.

I wonder tonight who the shepherds are who are hearing the angels bringing that first word of good news. They may be singing in the tent city here in St Louis of hope for a new life for those who have

no homes. They may be offering a gentle lullaby to nurses and aids and doctors and staff and patients in COVID ICU, letting them know that God is present, even in the midst of illness and despair. They may be greeting those desperately seeking a new life in this country as they cross the border, letting them know they, the strangers, are not strangers to God. They may be with those who are not sure where they will find the money to pay their rent, and put groceries on the table, when they are still out of work. As the Ghost of Christmas Present in *A Christmas Carol* declares, “It is Christmas here too, you know!”

Jesus is the God of all the world, the creator of all that is, breaking into *that* time and *that* place — and *this* time and *this* place — so that we can all, along with the shepherds who were the first to hear and share the news, know that the God who is bigger than we can possibly imagine, is also as small, and holdable, and accessible, and vulnerable, as this tiny baby, whose fingers and toes we can count once we step over the threshold and draw close to the manger.

God comes to us this night not in the big things — the world and the universe and the mountains and the seas — but in the smallest of the particulars. As we gather, in our cars or on our Zoom screens in our homes, the baby Jesus invites us to pay attention to the details, the miracle that is revealed when God shows up in tiny nose, fuzzy hair on an otherwise bald brown head, in the sound of gurgles and cries and burps, and the wiggling of brand-new arms and legs and fingers and toes.

This night, now that it has arrived, we don’t have to understand or prepare. The angel is calling to us, and we can join the shepherds and go to see for ourselves what God is doing. And the heavenly hosts will lead us in song: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to God’s people on earth.

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

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