

Christmas Eve 2022

Luke 2:1-20

What is the coldest you have ever been?

Was it last Thursday?

Or have you been even colder than that?

However cold you have ever been,
Try to imagine that the hills above Bethlehem
Were even colder.
So cold that the world cracked open.

When the cold is that severe,
Things fall apart.
You can hear the ice cracking,
Making a twanging sound
At the least pressure,
And the cracks spread everywhere.

In the coldest cold,
Trees crack apart.
You can hear the sound of them
Bursting out of their bark
And flying out in all directions.

In the coldest cold,
We can hardly breathe.

If you imagine or remember
That coldest cold,
You know something about what it felt like
On that hillside
Above Bethlehem.

It was as cold as Denver on Thursday;
It was as grey as a bombed out city in Ukraine;
The shepherds were as poorly sheltered
As our neighbors at the end of the block
Who reinforce their tents with tarps and cardboard.

In the coldest cold,
In the greyest grey,
In the loneliest and most inadequate shelter,
Things crack open.

The widest crack that ever split the world apart
Happened in the bleak midwinter,
on a cold winter's night,
A midnight clear,
A hundred generations ago.

It was a fearful and a wonderful thing.

Our fear
Is that when the world cracks open,
Darkness will pour through and overwhelm us.
If the biggest and truest thing in the world were darkness,
Then it would in fact be darkness that poured in.

But beyond us and around us it is light,
Not dark.
The cracking open is a fearful thing;
It seems that anything could happen.
And we are ill-equipped to meet
What might come.

But the story we tell again tonight
Invites us to wonder and to trust.
To trust, beyond what we can know or fear,
That what is beyond and around us
Is light.

That when the world cracks open,
Though it's a fearful thing,
It's a time to hope.
The crack is a beginning.
Not an end.

As the poets and singers of songs remind us –
That's how the light gets in.

The cold hillside above Jerusalem,
The grey and bombed cities of Ukraine,
The frail shelters of our neighbors down the block,
Those are the places,
Those cracked places,
Where the light gets in.

Sometimes the light looks like light,
A multitude of the heavenly host

Showering brightness across the night sky.

Sometimes the light looks like courage,
And fortitude.

Sometimes the light looks like justice,
And compassion.

And on this night,
In a mystery beyond what anyone could expect,
The light looks like a baby.

Nothing could be more mysterious than this.
When the angel breaks through the cold
Of the hillside
and good news pours through the crack in the sky
it is the kind of light we would expect.
Brilliance and blazing glory.

But the angels have surprising good news.
Bright as they are, they are not the light.
They point beyond themselves,
Away from the visible brightness,
Towards the tiniest, most humble being imaginable –
A homeless baby sleeping in a box.

We expect the light to look like a multitude of the heavenly host.
But the light is a baby who comes to us
And is God with us.

Into every broken place,
God creeps in,
Nestles in like a baby,
And makes a home.

God places the divine self
Into our arms,
A baby to hold,
To tend.

The light flooding in through the cracks in the world
Is so free, and so fearless,
That the light comes
As a being infinitely fragile and utterly dependent.
God entrusts all the light there is
To us.

God really did this.
That's the wonder of this simple story.
God placed the fullness of the divine self
Into our arms,
Like a baby to hold,
Mysterious, fragile,
Filled with new life.

Was it a good time, so long ago,
For God to be born as a baby?
Was it sensible to come to an oppressed people
Suffering under the brutal rule of a powerful empire?
Was it prudent to come in the middle of winter?
And, to come as a baby,
When people had been waiting for a king?
Should God have waited for a better time?
A better time than then?
A better time than now?
When there were not so many cracks in the world,
So many tears in the fabric of the cosmos?

But God won't wait.
Where the cracks in the world are,
That's where God is flooding in as light.
God will not wait for things to smooth out or settle down,
For the world to get back on an even keel,
Before coming among us as a baby.

That's the good news.
No baby waits until everything is ready
Before bursting onto the scene;
The baby comes when it's time.

This is the time for God to come.
Before we are ready,
Before we have things in order,
When the world is dark and cold and messy
And filled with anger and fear and sadness and weariness
And cracking under the strain.

The baby comes now,
And shows us how unready and yet how willing we are
To welcome hope,
To embrace joy,
To risk love.

Don't be afraid.
This is good news.
Take the baby God is holding out to you.

No matter what your experience,
No matter what your sorrows or losses,
Whether you feel adequate or not,
Don't be afraid to take the baby
Into your arms and into your heart.
This baby is good news of great joy.

And here is the greatest mystery of all.
The light comes as a baby,
As fragile and vulnerable as any baby.
The light comes as a baby who can hurt and cry and die.

And yet,
And yet,
This light is the light of all the world,
And the baby holds all that light.

And, in truth,
The baby is bigger than you are.
The baby can take care of you.
The baby will offer you
Everything you cannot give yourself:
Comfort and joy,
Peace and good will,
Reconciliation and hope.

That's the invitation of this holy night:
Accept the gift.
Take the risk,
Don't be afraid.
These are tidings of great joy,
For you, for us,
For anyone and everyone.

If you embrace the baby,
The baby will hold you fast,
And never let you go.

The baby you hold,
Holds you –
holds the whole world

in timeless, newborn hands.