

Reflection for Christmas Eve
Psalms 96, Isaiah 9:2-7, Luke 2:1-14
Blacksburg Presbyterian Church
Susan Verbrugge
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I stand here truly grateful to God that each of you has chosen to worship on this night. It might have been easier to stay home in front of the Christmas tree, with your feet up, and a cup of something warm in your hand. I am guessing that some of you have come out of habit. It is Christmas Eve after all. And going to church is what you do on Christmas Eve, right? Others of you might be here because you wanted to make your mom and dad or your aunt and uncle or your sister or brother happy by coming with them tonight. Others of you are here trying to find something...maybe not sure what you are trying to find, but something to fill that hole in your heart. And still others of you are here to intentionally welcome the Christ child again. And for many of us, it is a combination of these that brings us to this place tonight. My hope is that no matter why you are here, you might find in the music, in the candles, in the lights on the tree, in the silence, in the scripture readings, and yes, even in the sermon, the Christ child, born in your hearts anew.

One of my favorite times of the Christmas season each year will happen for me, I hope, in an hour or so. It happens when I go home after this worship service and find my house quiet. Ross has put the kids in bed, and much against their wills, they have fallen fast asleep. Ross is upstairs watching TV or reading a book. The lights on the tree are still glowing in the darkness of the living room. I make myself a cup of tea and sit on the couch by myself in the stillness. It is then that God births the mystery of God's incarnation into my heart again.

And, I say mystery intentionally here. For you see, I am a good Presbyterian. I spend a good deal of my time trying to understand and make sense of God's story. I question. I read. I talk. I discuss. I read some more. I question some more. For instance, I spent the last three months in Sunday School picking apart everything in the Apostle's Creed with some of you,

trying to make sense of it, trying to claim its truth for us. I try to wring out all the extraneous stuff to get to the “real” Truth, with a capital “T”.

So, in my wringing, I have to tell you that in the Christmas story, it’s really hard to find the logic. It’s really hard to find the answers. It truly doesn’t make any sense. To begin with, why would God want to become human in the first place? God is God, not human. That’s the way it is supposed to be!

And, what is a virgin birth anyway? Come on. There is no way that could happen. The Holy Spirit came upon her, and she was with child? Everyone knows it takes a man and a woman to make a baby. And, if you can get past that inexplicable piece of the story, why would God be born in some nasty barn in the back of an overcrowded inn in the middle of nowhere?

Here’s one for you. Just what is an angel anyway? Is there such a thing? If so, what do they look like? How will I know one when I see it? And if there actually are angels, what were the angels doing out in the fields? Shouldn’t they have been hovering over the smelly stable singing their loud praises to God, pointing toward the baby...or at least crooning a few lullabies?

A star led the visitors to the birthplace? A star? Please! Shouldn’t there have been neon signs with huge lights pointing down? And why in the world do some scrappy, nameless shepherds become the ones who get there first to see this Christ-child?

It makes no sense. The whole thing.

But, maybe that’s the point. Maybe the point is the mystery. If it made any sense whatsoever, would we pay such attention to it?

It seems to me that we are on dangerous ground when we try to wring the mystery out of God, when we try to make God’s amazing love and grace logical. For there’s no way it is. If it is logical, there is no way that God would come to this earth for me. There is no way that God could love me so totally. There is no way that God could look upon all us humans and say that it was worth it to come here, to live among us, to love us, to teach us how to live, to die, and then to live again so that we might have life. There is just no way.

So, tonight, I say, thanks be to God that God is God. Thanks be to God that God chose the unexpected and continues to choose the unexpected places and times to bring about new life, to be born into our world. Maybe, just maybe, it is in the mystery of it all that we find God. Maybe it's when we let go of control and let God be born however God chooses to be born that we find God.

For God still comes in the darkest of places and the smelliest of stables. God still comes as the bullets and bombs roar overhead. God still comes in the crowd smashed up against the fence where rice is being handed out. God still comes in the lowest pit of depression and in the doctor's office when the diagnosis is given. God still comes in the refugee camp.

Maybe Christmas is about the mystery. Maybe Christmas is about finding God where we least expect God to be.

May the mystery of the Christ child, God among us, be born in us this night, and tomorrow, and forever. Amen.