

December 24, 2021

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## Welcome the Seasons Christmas

John 1:1-5, 10-14

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Our Scripture reading on this Christmas Eve comes from John's Gospel in the first chapter. John writes,

*In the beginning the Word already existed.*

*The Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.*

*He existed in the beginning with God.*

*God created everything through him,  
and nothing was created except through him.*

*The Word gave life to everything that was created,  
and his life brought light to everyone.*

*The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness can never extinguish it.*

*He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.*

*So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.*

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

It's cold and dark this time of year in the upper Midwest. Wouldn't you rather be on a warm beach, just after the sun sets, with an umbrella drink in your hand and a balmy breeze in your hair, listening to the waves lapping on the shore. Doesn't that sound great?



As good as that sounds, that (pointing to the picture) isn't where you want to be. That isn't really a place at all. It's a broken and rusted car door. Sorry to get your hopes up!



Isn't it interesting how we see what we expect to see? Our expectations become the lens through which we see everything. Let me say that again. Our expectations become the lens through which we see everything.

And perhaps that explains, at least in part, one of the great mysteries in today's Scripture reading: How is it possible that God entered this world, but people couldn't see it? Or, to quote our scripture reading, "He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him." How is that possible? Even baby birds recognize their mother! How could they possibly miss God in their midst? And I can't help but wonder if it isn't because he wasn't what they expected.

Perhaps they expected a warrior angel, blazing in light with a fiery sword. Or a mighty god like Zeus in Greek mythology. But clearly, they didn't expect that the Creator of all things would come in the frail flesh of a child born to a humble couple in a backwater town. And so, they didn't recognize God in their midst.

God, it seems, has a habit of being revealed in unexpected ways and in unexpected places. Moses became aware of God in a burning bush. Jacob awakened to God's presence in a wilderness-dream of angels ascending and descending. Elijah encountered God in a still, small voice, and Paul encountered God in a flash of light that knocked him off his horse. God does indeed have a habit of being revealed in unexpected ways and in unexpected places.

So, the question I want to ask of us on this Christmas Eve is this: Where do we expect God to show up? Do we recognize God's presence in our midst, or do our

expectations blind us? Do we, like those on that first Christmas, expect that if God showed up it would be in a blaze of light? Or perhaps in this secular, material age we have no expectations at all, and so we don't have eyes to see.

Christmas invites us to expand our expectations, to dare to believe that all of creation is pregnant with possibility, marinated in the miraculous, so crammed full of the divine that you just never know where God will spill out next. You just never know where or how the Holy will trip you up to slow you down, grab you by the collar, look you in the eye and whisper, "I'm here. Always with you. Always for you." When we dare to live with such expectations, we begin to see the extraordinary in the seemingly ordinary. The gift of a new beginning in the beauty of a sunrise. The bubbling of joy in the laughter of a child. The healing of grace in a random act of kindness. A breath of hope in the smile of perfect stranger.

Do those things seem too mundane to you to hold the Holy? Too ordinary to bear the breath of the divine? I get it. It isn't what many of us have been taught to see or believe. But I have come to believe that anything that breathes hope, love and joy into our lives IS God at work, winking from behind the veil that separates the seen from the unseen. And I have found that living with eyes focused with that expectation transforms an ordinary day into an extraordinary encounter with the One whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

An airline is not a place I would not normally expect to see God at work. But then again, perhaps my expectations are too small. Watch this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luP81w2iA7E>

Isn't that amazing? Now, we can choose to see that as a manipulative play on our emotions to engender good feelings toward an airline who hopes to earn our business. Or we can see it as the mysterious movement of God breathing just a bit more generosity, joy and love into this world in unexpected ways and unexpected places.

Friends, the last couple of years have been incredibly difficult. The pandemic, the political divide, racial tensions, the climate crisis, and so much more. It's enough to make you want to close your eyes and just pretend you're on that warm beach somewhere else. But I want to invite you to not only open your eyes but to see through the lens of expectation, daring to believe that the One who was born into this world in a most unexpected way continues to be dwell among us.