

Christmas Sermon
The Rev. Sare Gordy
December 25, 2008

One dark and lonely night a child was born. It was a child like any other child, if you go by what that child taught, as an adult, but listening to his disciples reminisce, you'd think that God bent down that night and touched the earth – or maybe, that God bent down and touched the earth somehow more, or differently than God usually does, every time a child is born, every time compassion is displayed, every time we act to heal one another.

One dark and lonely night, a child was born. He was, to paraphrase a contemporary teacher, Tolle, like one of the first flowers on earth, before flowering plants were widespread, before flowering plants lasted for any length of time, before they became the norm, he appeared, this child, like a flower in a world unused to them. He did not last long, but in his short years became a beacon of hope and a purveyor of peace – true peace, the sort of peace that grows from reconciliation within community, as opposed to the peace that is imposed from the humiliation of war.

One dark and lonely night, two fretful parents-to-be took shelter in a stable, which was better than nothing, and certainly a symbol that the couple was anything but wealthy and affluent. The working poor, we might call them now, but that would be a false comparison, because in this country, in this culture, it is quite possible for an individual, couple, or family to change their socio-economic status through a number of means: everything from a university education to a lucky break. There were no such opportunities then, back in that moment, in that dark and lonely night. There were the rich, the poor, and the utterly destitute. This couple was simply poor.

One dark and lonely night, in the in-between watches after night has fallen, before dawn has broken, a woman cried out in the pangs of her first childbirth. A child wailed its first cry into the night, a father held his family close, and the lullaby that came later was accompanied by the bass of the cows and the treble of the donkeys.

Did it happen this way, just as we heard in Luke, with the shepherds and the poverty? Or was it perhaps a little more like Matthew's version, focusing on the kingship of Jesus, with the three kings traveling from so far away? Or are we like Mark in that we don't care – it doesn't matter to us how he was born, just that he lived?

I will admit my own bias, and it is twofold. For sheer theology and historical accuracy, I'm firmly in Mark's camp; Mark, who begins his story with the baptism of Jesus and says not word one about any foretold birth. And yet, flip that coin and you'll see me on the other side, happily willing to wrap the story of Jesus' birth around myself like a blanket on a cold night, willing to simply be dazzled by the mystery of the surface story, even while I'm invited to recognize the whys and wherefores of the symbolism out of which it is constructed.

It's the multiplicity of perspectives which stand in seeming contradiction from one another, but in reality, only serve to illuminate different facets of the same life, not wholly historically accurate, nor inaccurate, not entirely Midrash, but not without redaction and editorial commentary. Endlessly self-referencing, and purely a construct of the culture and the people who told the stories, and yet ever evolving as our relationship with God will do, every changing and maturing, and seeking to evoke even while describing a bonified encounter with the living god.

And so, one dark and lonely night,
 like so many others of its kind,
God reached down and touched the earth,
 as God has done so many times before and since.
A child was born,
Who had the potential of the kingdom of God in his eyes
He was perfect, and beautiful,
 Just like Moses was,
 Just like Joey and Jr. and little Ruthie were,
And he grew up to live a life that changed the world
 Just like we do.

Amen.