

Lighting of the Candle:

It is the 3rd Sunday of Advent and so we light the shepherd's candle...

If you sometimes feel afraid...

if you sometimes feel like you are not good enough,

or if you have ever felt disregarded or disrespected...

This candle is being lit for you....

Come! the Angels are announcing good news for you....

Reading:

Luke 2: 8-20

**In that region there were shepherds living in the fields,
keeping watch over their flock by night.**

**Then an angel of the Lord stood before them,
and the glory of the Lord shone around them,
and they were terrified.**

But the angel of the Lord said to them,

“Do not be afraid; for see-

I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:

to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,

who is the Messiah, the Lord.

This will be a sign for you:

you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

**And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,
praising God and saying,**

**“Glory to god in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”**

**When the angels had left them and gone into heaven,
the shepherds said to one another,**

**‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place which the
Lord has made known to us.**

**So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph,
and the child lying in the manger.**

**When they saw this, they made known what had been told them
About this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds
told them**

but Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

**The shepherds returned,
glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen,
as it had been told to them.**

Meditation:

Last Saturday Pilgrimage to the Manger happened once again...

Perhaps you were there...or have participated in years past...

**and if you have had the experience...you know what
a truly a special event it is!**

**Even my grown up children tell me it helps to make the Christmas stories
real...**

**And I think that is soooo very important:
the stories we read,
the truths they are convey...
are real even if they are not necessarily historically or scientifically true.**

**I once heard a Native American wise man begin the telling of the stories
of his tradition with:**

**“I don’t know if it happened exactly this way or not,
but I know that it is true.”**

**In my own experience when I was studying Scripture I was told:
“Everything in the Bible is true, and some of it really happened!”**

**I bring this all up, because a lot of people today,
have begun to discount these ancient stories because
because they seem so far fetched and unbelievable.
Folks disregard them because they know they can’t possibly
be scientifically or historically accurate...
so why bother with them???**

In regards to our story today...

**We could demand to know if a multitude of heavenly hosts
really did appeared to a band of shepherds on a hillside on December 25
thousands of years ago....**

**or was Jesus really wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger?
or was he as plump and blond as a newborn as we often see on
our Christmas cards and religious art??**

and probably our answers would be ‘no’ except perhaps that he

was more than likely swaddled after birth...

but the more important questions are:

Would your faith be shaken if those details were not historically accurate?

or does your faith rest on the deeper truths of the story that are not quite so obvious?

and if your faith rests on the deeper truths...what are they?

All of the stories of our Tradition...

all of the rituals, all the celebrations,

**all the songs, the meals, the smells and the bells as they say
are not simply to remind us about long ago events,**

but they are meant to awaken within us,

in our lives the truth that he was born to make known:

~that the Lord God of the Cosmos is

humble and ordinary and lives among us.

~that the Divine Mystery is everywhere

and to see the Divine in the ordinary...

requires a simplicity of heart, mind and soul.

~that we were all born to make Love known in all its many ways...

and so today, I would like to invite you to another journey with me...

I would like to use an ancient prayer practice suggested by St. Ignatius...

To use our imagination as we place ourselves inside the story,

and then notice what comes up for us.

*So now, I would invite you, if you are comfortable to close your eyes
and breathe deeply...*

*and in your imagination place yourself
sitting among the shepherds as they sit around the night fire...*

*Feel the cold breeze on your cheeks and
stretch out your hands and feel the warmth of the fire ...*

Can you hear the sheep softly calling to each other?

Do you hear a dog bark in the distance?

Suddenly you are blinded by light!

you cover your face, you dare to squint and begin to tremble...

and then you hear The voice:

do not be afraid...

Go quickly to Bethlehem, the Messiah has been born!

Run fast, leave everything!

You will find the child swaddled lying in a manger.

*You will not find your salvation in the royal palace or in the great temple,
but you will find your salvation in the presence of Love....”*

And then as if on cue,

the light intensifies

and a heavenly sound like you have never heard before

surrounds you and it is beautiful!

and then you begin to run, as fast as you can...

through the darkness.

You see the lights of the village ahead...

you dash from one place to another,

until you finally see the babe...as you were told.

and you stop.

Your chest is heaving....your heart is pounding...

and as you slowly regain your breath...

You can literally, palpably feel the presence God ...

You enter now slowly and silently...

and you look into her eyes and you know that what the angel said is true.

What ever the Divine Mystery is...it is here...it is palpable...and it is love.

When I was writing this meditation last week...experiencing it for myself...

I could feel my heart tingling because

I felt humbled with love and gratitude...

I felt gratitude because it occurred to me that most mysterious, most gracious, most powerful force in the Cosmos...that which we call God, is found in the most ordinary and yet extraordinary of experiences... the birth of a baby...

I felt gratitude because we don't have to be good enough to earn an experience of God...

think about it: we all know

the shepherds weren't especially holy or religious...

and I felt humbled because there is nothing I can do to make God appear:

the shepherds were just sitting around minding their own business

when the mystery of the Divine exploded into their consciousness...

all I can do is be willing and open to however God desires to be know...

knowing that it might not be what I am expecting or even wanting...

The Shepherds trusted their experience of God as did Mary and Joseph.....

**All of their invitations were certainly 'out of the box'...
they were probably thought to be foolish...and perhaps a little bit crazy.
When you imagine the shepherds that night...
did all of them believe what had happened?
Did some think the others were drunk?
Did those who raced to Bethlehem get made fun of for leaving their sheep
alone?**

**I suspect that the Shepherds as well as Mary and Joseph had plenty of
naysayers...
but they did not let that deter them...**

**and so the questions remain for us:
When...not if...but when we have an experience of God:
are we willing to trust our experience of the Divine Mystery?
are we willing to trust God?**

That is the invitation of Christmas...

Amen.