

**Reading:**

**Now, Let us listen to the full story of the birth of Jesus the Christ as told in the Gospel of Luke....**

**About this time Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the whole world.**

**Everyone was required to return to his ancestral home for this registration. And because Joseph was a member of the royal line, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, King David's ancient home—journeying there from the Galilean village of Nazareth. He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was obviously with child at the time.**

**While they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. and she gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the village inn.**

**That night some shepherds were in the fields outside the village, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly—an angel appeared among them and the landscape shone brightly with the glory of the Lord! They were badly frightened, but the angel reassured them.**

**“Do not be afraid!” he said.**

**“I bring you the most joyful news ever announced and it is for everyone!**

**The Savior-Yes, the Messiah, The Lord—**

**has been born tonight in Bethlehem!**

**How will you recognize him?**

**You will find the baby wrapped in a blanket, lying in a manger!"**

**Suddenly the Angel was joined by a vast Heavenly host—  
all singing and praising God.**

**"Glory to God in the Highest Heaven," they sang,  
"and peace to all peoples on Earth."**

**When the multitude of angels had returned again to Heaven,  
the shepherds said to each other, "Come! Let's go to Bethlehem!  
Let us see this wonderful thing that has happened,  
which the Lord has told us about."**

**They ran to the village and found their way to Mary and Joseph  
and there was the baby, lying in the manger.**

**The shepherds told everyone what had happened and  
what the Angel said to them about the Child.**

**All who heard the shepherds' story were amazed,  
That is all but Mary, who quietly treasured these things in her heart and  
often thought about them.**

**Then the shepherds went back again to their fields and flocks,  
praising God for the visit of the Angels and  
because they had seen the child.... just as the Angel had told them.**

**A reading from the Gospel of Luke....**

**Meditation:**

**“Do not be afraid!” the angel said.  
“I bring you the most joyful news ever announced  
and it is for everyone!  
The Savior-Yes,  
the Messiah,  
the Lord—  
has been born tonight in Bethlehem!**

**This, my friends, is the reason that we gather this night...**

**Jesus has been born in Bethlehem of Judea...**

**He is the reason for the Carols that we sing...**

**the tree that we decorate...**

**the cookies we bake....**

**and the presents we buy...**

**or... so we say!**

**You know...often times I hear people complain**

**that Christmas is waaaayyyy too commercialized.**

**That we have forgotten the reason for the season...**

**that we focus too much on eating, gifting and celebrating...**

**But...I'll be honest...I kinda like the cookies, the tree, and the presents.**

**And...I'll have to admit...It is often a whole lot easier to focus on all that fun stuff....**

than to acknowledge and accept the deeper reason for the season.  
Right on! you might be thinking...  
Of course we ought to be focusing on birth of Jesus in Bethlehem!  
because that's the reason for the season...you might be thinking...  
and of course it is...  
but only on one relatively superficial level.

What I would like for you to consider this night  
is that Jesus' birth in Bethlehem thousands of years ago  
is only scratching the surface for celebrating Christmas.

I would like for you to consider, that the deeper reason to celebrate Christmas  
is to celebrate God's birth in and through  
each and every one of us!

Remembering and celebrating an event from so long ago  
is good...no doubt about it...  
but celebrating a one time event in the long ago past...  
does nothing to transform our lives nor the world we live in...

I would like for you to consider,  
that what we truly celebrate at Christmas is a deep knowing...  
that the Holy One of the Cosmos,  
the Creator of all that is...  
the God of Jesus the Christ  
lives and breathes  
and loves  
in us and through us...

**What we celebrate at Christmas is the birth of God  
over and over and over again...  
not only in each and every human person...  
but through each and every human person whenever compassion, forgiveness,  
mercy, and joy are present.**

**As Sister Kathy Sherman sings...**

**“And where is Bethlehem today? Not in a place or a time that’s far away.  
Wherever Love is born, there is Christmas morn.”**

**Christmas happens every time  
we forgive someone...  
every time we show kindness,  
every time we offer compassion...  
every time we enlarge our circle of care and concern...  
every time we pray for those we love  
and every time we pray for our enemies.**

**Christmas happens every time  
we offer comfort to those who mourn,  
companionship to those who are lonely,  
warm clothes to those who are cold  
and a meal to those who are hungry...**

**Christmas happens every time,  
we offer someone an affirming word,  
a supportive presence,  
and an understanding heart...**

**Each and every time we do any of these things...**

we celebrate Christmas....  
because we give birth, once again,  
to the Presence of God in our lives...  
and WE make known the Reign of Heaven on Earth here and now.

That is what Jesus taught.  
and it is what he gave his life for so very long ago...

the question of course is: do we dare to believe it?  
Do we dare to believe that God has been born in us...  
so that God may be born through us?  
That can be scary...it often feels like way to much responsibility...  
It is way easier to bow down and worship God from afar,  
saying I am not worthy...  
I am not capable  
I am not talented...  
I am just me....

Often times, we know much too well  
and have been told *way* too often about  
our limitations, our faults and our failures,  
so we think God could never possibly be a part of me...

and then we look at what isn't right in our lives...  
when we look at what is scary and hard and what hurts in our lives...  
and we might think to ourselves that if God was really here...  
all of *this* wouldn't be happening...

You know...I can well imagine that the disciples of Jesus thought that too

**as he was being crucified...**

**Being human is not easy! to point out the obvious...**

**But being born with the presence of God imbedded within  
is not meant to make life easy nor smooth...**

**It is meant to offer us the strength and the courage and the wisdom to bear  
the mystery and the fragility of life.**

**But being born with the presence of God imbedded within  
is meant to help us see and experience the wonder, the beauty and the joy of being alive.**

**Being born with the presence of God imbedded within  
is meant to awaken within us the sure awareness that we are not  
alone and that we truly, wholly, unconditionally loved and loveable.**

**Please don't get me wrong...it is right and good and beautiful to celebrate Jesus' birth!  
The cookies, the carols, the cards, the candlelight...the celebrations  
the presents...  
it is all good,**

**Ohhh....But we can not stop there...**

**Let us take his birth and his life seriously  
so that we can take our own seriously...**

**Because when we do,  
We will no longer tolerate hunger or hatred...  
We will no longer accept war as just the way that it is...  
We will no longer look away from loneliness...**

**We will no longer look at any human being simply as an object to like or dislike,  
use or discard...**

**We will no longer be afraid....**

**When we are willing to become aware of the Presence of God  
deep within ourselves and everyone else...**

**we will know, not in our heads but in our hearts  
that life, even with all its struggles and all its uncertainties,  
is the most beautiful and wonder-full opportunity imaginable...**

**So, this night... ..let us celebrate Jesus' birth in Bethlehem ...**

**let us sing and tell the stories, eat the cookies and exchange the gifts ...**

**But sometime soon...**

**please find a quiet spot somewhere for a few moments and listen...**

**Listen for the angels singing the good news of your birth...**

**For truly indeed, God has been born once again...**

**And for that, we can all whisper "Thank you".....**

**Amen.**