

Pastor Colleen's Christmas Eve Sermon 2009

Grace, Peace and Mercy be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Tonight is about birth.

Tonight we celebrate the birth of a child in a manger,
tonight we celebrate the birth of light in the darkness,
tonight we celebrate the birth of hope that counters our fears.

And the hope that we celebrate tonight ...

The hope that we long for and have been desperate for...

Is the very same hope and light that the world was praying and longing for over 2,000 years ago

The world that Christ was born into was a world that was filled with darkness

It was a time of uncertainty

It was a time when people were unsure where their next meal was coming from

It was a world filled with war and hate

It was a time of poverty, and unemployment,

hunger and homelessness

It was a world in desperate need....

In reality...

It was a world much like the one we live in today...

Isn't that odd?

Doesn't it seem that after more than 2,000 years

Our present world should look and feel a lot different than it did back when Jesus was born?

After more than 2,000 years shouldn't we be in better shape?

Sure our world "looks" pretty different but in reality...

We experience all of the same doubts, insecurities, and fears that were present 2,000 years ago.

War, racism, hate, discrimination,

Disease, cancer, lack of affordable health care,

Foreclosure, rising costs,

Unemployment, violence, and fears for our children...

The list of fears is long

There is a lot to be afraid of and if we let it fear can fill our lives

In our gospel story for tonight... there was much fear as well

The fear of a young woman, a teenager really, pregnant too soon.

The fear of shepherds surprised by a bright light.

The fear of peasants living under the thumb of the rich and powerful.

And ...hidden in the shadows of the story...

Was the fear of the powerful that they would be replaced.

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Fear was everywhere that night
And for many darkness is a symbol of fearfulness
For the shadows hide the unknown.
The shadows are where danger lurks.

And into that night filled with fear and darkness light is born,
light that overcomes all the darkness of our lives.
light which helps us find our way in a world of uncertainty.
Light that brings us hope
Light that exposes all our fears,
Our shame
Our doubts...
Light that shines so brightly there are no shadows, no places for our fears to lurk and hide and overwhelm us.

Tonight we celebrate a birth...
We celebrate our God being born into our world...again
and again...
Over and over...

Christmas is the promise that we are not alone,
that God has not forsaken us.
As the Holy One becomes incarnated in our lives
we see new possibilities for our lives
we see new opportunities for grace to make us new
we see new chances for love to rule our lives
we see new ways for us to share, and give, and be in this world.
Christmas gives birth to the reality that the Reign of God is present among us.

It is said that the birth of any child is God saying that there is hope for the future.
Christmas marks the birth of hope in a world that can,
and will,
and must,
be a better place for all.
The baby in the manger reminds us to care for the least and weakest among us.

But it's easy to be distracted by this baby...
Because often we may think what difference could this little baby really be to our lives...
Because face it...he's not what we expect.
We are so busy looking for a magic wand to wave over our lives and transform all our grief...
We are so busy looking for something bigger and better that we forget that
In this baby we get a constant companion, full of grace and love.
We are looking for a shining figure to come in the clouds and wipe our tears away...
But we get instead a lover of our souls who treasures every tear.
We look for a voice to speak from on high...
instead we get a quiet whisper,

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speaking truth and peace into the busyness and distraction of our lives.

Tonight we celebrate the birth of a new way of living and being in this world.

Tonight God becomes one of us so that we can know God better.

In Jesus, God reaches out to us and says,

"I am always here.

I love you.

I want to know you and I want you to know me."

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ

we have the unending gift of a love that reaches out to us,

prevailing over every adversity,

even death,

even our own failures,

and always we have a God who wants to know and love us,

even when we don't want to know and love God back.

That is the hope that was birthed into the world over 2,000 years ago

and that is the same hope that is birthed into the world this night and every night.

That is the Christmas miracle...

that God's love,

God's reaching,

God's presence,

God's graciousness to us never ever ends.

This night hope is born again.

In the midst of a world that is changing

In the midst of our lives which can be so full of fear

The Good News is the same as the angel's message to Mary and to the Shepherds.

Be Not Afraid! Fear Not! Great things are happening.

For unto us, **all of us**, is born tonight hope,

and love, and peace, and light.

Christmas means birth.

Birth means possibility and promise and potential.

The angels don't tell us not to be afraid because there is nothing to fear.

The angel's message tells us not to be afraid because there is Good News that can bring light to the darkness,

hope to those who despair,

life where there is death,

and love that overpowers fear.

Be not afraid.

God is born among us again tonight.

May the light, promise and hope of Christmas

carry you forward into this crazy world throughout the year that is to come.

Joy to the World! The Lord is come!

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Merry Christmas.
Amen.

May the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen