CHRISTMAS DAY

Nu’uanu Congregational Church

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*“The Christmas Story”* Luke 2:1-20

At this time of the year, the theaters and our television schedules are filled with Christmas movies and Christmas specials. Each story presents a line of characters and tells us how each of them is transformed by Christmas magic.

Actually, there is no magic to it. However, there is a miracle: God came down at Christmas. God came into the world like every other human baby—like you and me—and lived like a human person. Jesus came into the world as a human baby and needed all of the things you and I needed as babies.

Jesus also did all of the usual things human creatures do: he needed and received the care and nurture of a human mother, he needed and received the guidance and care of a human father, he ate (often with friends and at friends’ houses), he walked along dusty roads and became thirsty. Occasionally, when his disciples would leave him alone, he prayed,…and he slept.

However, the real miracle of Jesus’ birth is not only that “God became human and dwelled among us,” it is that God came to us as a child of humbleness. When Luke tells us that Mary “wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger because there was not room for them in the inn,” Luke is telling us just how vulnerable Jesus and his family were.

*That* is the miracle—that our thoughts and our imaginations are redirected from the rich and mighty, and even from our own selves, and redirected toward the most humble and vulnerable among us.

That Mary and Joseph were forced, by royal decree, to leave their home—even when Mary was so close to her delivery date. They were forced to leave their home and travel some seventy miles to Bethlehem. This invites us to see their hardship and their struggle and the way it is repeated today in the lives of so many families throughout the world. Jesus was born into a world torn by war and oppression. In his world of ancient occupied Palestine, we are meant to see him in all children who are victimized by war and destruction, and the tyrants who cause them.

Likewise, we are asked to remember Jesus when we encounter others who are without a home—the houseless, but also the refugee and the immigrant—we are to see his face in the face and the situation of all who are in need of a safe, comfortable place to rest and to be at peace.

Their plight should bring to mind Jesus’ own plight, and it is meant to move us—not in the kind of romantic, sentimental way that only evokes momentary feeling.

 Jesus came into the world so that we would see and realize that members of the body of Christ should not have to endure such struggle and suffering. We are meant to be moved to deep and righteous anger—the kind of anger that inspires a kind of steadfast determination to overturn the human institutions and systems that have made God’s people refugees, have made them poor, that make them suffer.

Every time we see another person suffering, we are to see the face of Christ, and in seeing him in such a plight, we are to allow God’s love to inspire us to find ways to dismantle the social and economic structures, the systems, and also the cultural prejudices, and bigotries that demean and humiliate other people. Together we must work to restore peace to the home they fled, for it is our home too.

As the Rev. William Butler, one of the founders of the Poor People’s Movement has reminded us, when we think of the vulnerable children born today, in Palestine, Ukraine, South Sudan, and also at home in the impoverished, underserved parts of America, “we are not to ask: ‘What child is this?’ — because we know that they are ours — to acknowledge and protect, with the shepherds and kings.”

At Christmas—and far beyond Christmas, for as long as we call ourselves Christians—we are called to a labor of love that will make all children safe, that gives all children hope and a future. In short, we are to love them not only as we love ourselves or our own children. We are to love and honor them the way *God* loves and honors us…and them, *all* of them.

The popular media tells a lot of wonderful stories at this time of the year. When it comes to Christmas stories on television and in the movies, my favorites are “How the Grinch Stole Christmas,” “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” and the musical retelling of Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol,”* staring Albert Finney.

They are all wonderful. They all try to tell the same story of finding our heart and caring for others. However, lest we wander too far from it, the story of the birth of Christ as told in the Gospels, *this* is the Christmas story that all the others come from. *This* is the original that we are to hear and remember. Indeed, it is the story we are to *live*, over and over again in our own lives and stories, and in the lives and stories of all God’s beloved people.

So, my Christmas prayer for all of us is that we rejoice and give thanks for the story of Christ, and that we see him, and cherish him, in all of our relationships, and through all of our lives. Amen.