

**Sermon by The Rev. Betsy Johns Roadman, 12/24/05**  
**St. Augustine's Church, Croton-on-Hudson, New York**  
**Christmas Eve; Text: Luke 2:1-20**

A week ago last Monday, I was scheduled to have lunch with a friend – a priest with whom I was ordained in 2001. We emailed each other to confirm. “Are you up for this?” I asked Patty. Do you have way too much going on?” “Well, I definitely could use the time in the office,” she said, “but I also need a break.” We went back and forth, hoping that one of us would make the decision. Neither of us had the heart to call it off, so we staggered to Malabar Hill in Elmsford, halfway for each of us.

We both had dark circles under our eyes – she, because she’s priest-in-charge of a congregation, the mother of two small boys and pregnant with a third, and the wife of the rector of a different church; I, because I had, in a moment of complete insanity, decided to have the interior of our house painted in the two weeks leading up to Christmas. When I should have been sleeping, I was emptying closets or trying to find my prayer book or my shoes, either of which could have been buried under any number of drop cloths.

Patty and I stared at each other over our Indian food, almost too tired to talk. “Advent has completely wiped me out,” she admitted. “I’m not sure I’ll still be standing by Christmas Eve.” I responded, “I feel like I’ve already said everything there is to say about the coming of Christ to us during the Sundays of Advent. What could possibly be new and exciting in this story that we’ve already heard a thousand times?”

A couple of days after that, in the midst of my ongoing fatigue and the ever-growing mountain of drop cloths, I re-read this evening’s Gospel from Luke, in preparation for writing the Christmas Eve sermon. And I was stunned to find my eyes filling with tears. Because even though we have heard it before, the implications of this story are simply astounding. No matter how familiar the words, the reality that they communicate is extraordinarily good news.

This story is about God’s promised anointed One coming in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The creator God whom we recognize in the splendor and complexity of the galaxies has become known, as well, in flesh and blood. In Jesus, we have experienced God dwelling among us. In Jesus, the character and the intention of God are fully and perfectly revealed. We need never wonder what the will of God might be, because Jesus’ life shows us, clearly and specifically. The person of Jesus is the reflection of God’s glory; the exact imprint of God’s very being. The transcendent God has been made known to us in Jesus.

And this story is about God’s promised anointed One coming to us and being made known to us not in wealth, might, power, and fanfare, but in need and vulnerability. The holy One was born into a family that was temporarily homeless, needing to rely on the generosity of others for a birthing room. Throughout his life, Jesus stood with those who were the outcasts, the strangers. When he died, even his tomb wasn’t his own – it was offered by someone whose life had been touched by the presence and love of Jesus. The

One who was the full and perfect revelation of God didn't live a life of entitlement, focused on the accumulation of honors or possessions. He lived simply, justly and compassionately. He lived a life of sacrificial love.

Dear friends in Christ, what does that tell us? If we believe that in Jesus, we have seen the face of God, then we need never ask ourselves, "What is God's intention for my life?" We already know. If, in Jesus' life, we have seen the very heart of God, we make Jesus' priorities our priorities. We live simply, justly, and compassionately. We live a life of sacrificial love.

As we gather to celebrate this extraordinary gift of "God with us," we have the privilege of responding. Whoever we are, and whatever our vocation, our level of income, our family situation, our health, our past successes, failures, inattention, or distraction, the gift to the world of Jesus calls us to turn again toward God. Being in right relationship with God, re-aligning our heart with God's means, for us as Christians, making Jesus' priorities our priorities.

How might God be calling and enabling each of us, individually, and all of us as a faith community, to live simply, justly, and compassionately? Who are the people whose suffering we have the means to help alleviate, empowered by the Spirit of Christ?

In a land of deep darkness, a light shines. May the light of Christ that has come into the world this night so set our hearts on fire that our lives may, like his, be ablaze with love. Amen.