

Saturday, December 24, 2011
Nativity of Our Lord (I), Christmas Eve

Isaiah 9:2–7
Psalm 96
Titus 2:11–14
Luke 2:1–14 [15–20]

I.N.I.

Repeat after me: *The birth of Jesus is wonderful.*

The cast of characters that blow in and out of, around and over Bethlehem include shepherds and angels, emperors and tax-burdened travelers, bean-counters and religious zealots. In other words, a wide swath of humanity, the mighty and the lowly.

Repeat after me: *The birth of Jesus is awesome.*

Angels sing. Shepherds run. Mary ponders. Joseph boils water (actually, it doesn't say that he boiled water).

As wonderful as Jesus' birth is, as awesome as this story is, I have to say one more thing, at least one more thing. Repeat after me: *The birth of Jesus is—ordinary.*

Forget for a minute about Mary's unwed and Holy Spirit-oriented circumstances.

Forget for a moment about the clamor of angels.

Forget about quaint carols, and sugar-coated greeting cards.

Zone in on that gospel scene set in a manger.

There was no peace.

Augustus was putting the screws on the people, to squeeze out denarii for his own jollies.

It wasn't a silent night. Everyone and his uncle came to Bethlehem to find family, to stand and be counted. Mary and Joseph had to share space with farm animals, not famous for either their hygiene or their solitude.

Any of you ever give birth? Were you scared? Was there any degree of pain or effort?

When your baby came out, was she beautiful? Wasn't he covered in goo and blood? Wasn't she butt naked?

Did you ever feel so needed in your life?

So a child was born, under circumstances just described. Children are born each day, under more pleasant circumstances. Children are born every day, under less desirable circumstances.

This child, this Jesus-child, placed in a food dish for cows,
under the Roman occupation,
to parents who couldn't even find a decent Motel 6,
within this ordinary birth like babies born everywhere,
is given the acclamation reserved only for royalty, is revered, is praised up and down, is given
homage like the supremely magnificent powerful excellent Messiah by angelic hosts and
slobbering shepherds.

What's with that?

Repeat after me: *The birth of Jesus is subversive.*

That's right, you heard me, subversive, meaning going counter to the prevailing wind, meaning
overthrowing expectations, meaning toppling the old world order (or disorder, as is really the
case), meaning siding with the poor and beaten down of the universe.

Can you imagine God, subverting the world as it careens from the rule of tyrants, turning over
pomp and circumstance, and identifying with you, and me?

Can you think of it, God, through this child, going topsy-turvy, coming inside-out, entering
under the radar, practically sneaking into the world's mess in order to save it?

If you can, then Christ is born for you.

Then Christmas is the dramatic tectonic-plate shifting event that the gospel means it to be.

Then the wood of the manger points you to the wood of the cross.

Then, Jesus the child now all grown up, heals the sick, feeds the hungry, forgives the sinner,
casts out the demonic, preaches and teaches justice for the poor.

God in Christ claims a beleaguered and weary-worn community.

God in Christ draws close as on the wood of cross is lifted up.

And Jesus, born to Mary, entering history, one of us, is shown to be God in the flesh, and by
dying on the cross and being raised, also subverts the terror of death.

Therefore, Christmas is a serious, purposeful, and good business that meets us where we live and
breathe, and worry and suffer and die.

Christmas is light overcoming the darkness, one child at a time.

Christmas is peace for the cosmos, where army surplus is thrown on the burn pile and becomes
heating fuel.

If Christmas, by announcing Jesus being born, is anything, then it means all our human inventions and intentions are molded to God's intervention.

On this Christmas, allow God to enter in. Allow God incarnate, enfleshed in Jesus, to be born in us.

While we eat our ham or roast, or whatever, while we share gifts, while we visit family, in the light of the story of Jesus' birth, might I suggest that you tryout these Christmas practices, alongside other good and godly practices:

Practice forgiveness as if your life depended on it.

Practice peace, with justice, as if the world would not get along without it.

Seek God, and find God in all corners of the human equation, as if Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without it.

And here, now,

Turn to someone close to you and if you and they are willing squeeze each other's hand, and say to one another, Christ is born.

Turn to someone far away in this space, locate a searching eye and heart, and say peace on earth, good will to all.

Here now, together in Christ, spoken of here, revealed in flesh and blood here, tasted in bread and wine here, God joins with the world, to save, redeem, love, and carry us through to the joys of heaven.

Repeat after me:

The birth of Jesus is wonderful.

[The birth of Jesus is] awesome.

[The birth of Jesus is] ordinary.

[The birth of Jesus] is subversive.

The birth of Jesus is for the life of the world.

Glory to God. Glory to God in the highest. Glory to God in the highest heaven.

Amen.

I.N.I.