

The Rev. Kate Byrd
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Where Christ is Born

I don't know about you, but for me, all of my memories, feelings, and ideas around the Christmas story take place in the dark of night, when the business of the world has settled (at least a bit) and the chill of the evening air has become crisp. There is a peacefulness to it, almost in a way that allows the darkness to change from its usual space of instability and unknowns to one of endless possibilities and even enveloping safety. It is as if the dark is required, at least in my mind, for the miracle of Christmas to take place. As if we are brought all the way back to the beginning of time, when there was nothing, but Divine Presence, and (as we hear in Genesis) complete chaos, and darkness covering the face of the deep. Where Adam was formed out of dirty dark dust and Eve was created from the gutsy dark insides of her partner. This is the space, and the people and the time where Christ comes from.

Because, the truth of the matter is, at least for me, if Christmas only comes when all the packages are pristinely wrapped and under a perfectly lit tree. While the last pie is cooling on the counter, and filling the air with every sweet and sinful scent. As each corner is bursting with greenery and tied up with bows. When the work is all done and there is nothing left to do but sit and enjoy the beauty of the season, then a.) (for me in particular) it will never come and b.) I want no part of it. Which is why I love that Christmas takes place in the midst of the dark. In the wrong place, as Mary is traveling and far from the safety of her doctors, from the freshly furnished nursery and the pre packed hospital bag. At the wrong time, as king Herod pursues them (and all first born male) forcing the Holy family to flee as refugees. To the wrong people, as Mary and Joseph are not even married yet, and certainly not of the right age or stage or situation in life to bring a newborn into the world (but, I mean let's be honest who ever is). This to me, is the beauty, and the miracle of Christmas, this is the beauty and the miracle of our Christian faith, and this, especially, is the beauty and miracle of our God!

This year, or at least this time, I am beginning to see what a miraculous, sacrificial, and even redemptive gift Christmas itself is. As Christians, so much, I think we focus on good Friday and Easter morning as the pinnacle of our faith (and for good reason). And yet, here on this night we hear God say, "Hey, I love you, I chose you, I am a part of you! So much so that tonight, I am not only coming to you, but becoming you!" And, not even (what we may consider as) the best, most desirable, most luxurious, most sterile, or even the most holy parts of us! God says, "I am becoming the most difficult, the most frustrating, the most dirty, the most unassuming, and most undeniable reality that is us!" Because, God says, "it is the beautiful and miraculous truth of us!" The truth that we and the world we live in were created out of darkness and chaos. Not as something we must overcome, but as something we must claim. Not because we are defined by darkness or even chaos (although sometimes it may feel that way), but because they are the parts that call us towards the light and towards redemption.

Just think of it, Without the darkness the Magi would never have seen the star that guided them to the Christ Child. Without the chaos of having to protect sheep by night the shepherds would not have been the first to come and greet the newborn Messiah. And too without the dominating rule of the Roman Empire who required Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem for the census the Messiah of the world would never have been born in that iconic stable or placed atop the infamous hay of a feeding trough. The darkness and chaos may be a part of our reality, but I am not sure it is the bad part, because I think it is the very part that calls us towards the light. They are the parts that call us to fill our blessing box, to take all the angels from our angel tree, to ring bells for the salvation army, to bring flowers to those who are homebound, and to prepare meals for those who may one day be in need of warm sustenance.

This is the beauty and miracle of the story we hear tonight, of the faith we take part in, and of the God who claims us. The beauty and miracle that in chaos and in darkness the Divine comes to birthed and grow and dwell. And so, this evening I want to encourage us to linger in the chaos, and maybe even the darkness, at least for a moment longer. Whether it be in the chaos of the holiday with all that it holds or even the darkness that sometimes comes with it. Because it is here we will see the light. It is here we will hear the angels. And, It is here that maybe, just maybe, like Mary, we too will birth the Divine! Or like the magi we will travel towards it! Or even like the shepherds we will witness it and share it with the world. Because, this, this light, this night, this right here is good news of great joy for all people. Merry Christmas.