

Christmas Eve 2008 Year B  
St. Matthew's-Warson Woods  
Texts: Isaiah 9:2-7  
Psalm 96  
Titus 2:11-14  
Luke 2:1-20

“to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

**When I was in junior high something most astonishing happened to a family who lived down the street from my house. The O'Connor's were a large Irish Catholic family with six children. The youngest, and only girl was in my class at school and although we weren't very close friends we were friendly enough with one another to go over each other's houses occasionally.**

**Mr. O'Connor was a New York City bus driver who commuted into the city every day from our bedroom community in New Jersey. Mrs. O'Connor was a stay at home mom. Their house was always filled with kids: theirs, their children's friends, and friends of friends. It was a place that the children of the neighborhood just kind of wound up at.**

**One day, after Mr. O'Connor's run had ended, Mr. O'Connor took his bus back to the garage. As he did everyday he walked down the aisle to retrieve left behind umbrellas, newspapers and other forgotten or unwanted items.**

**At the very back of the bus he saw something lying underneath the last seat, wadded up. When he went to pick it up, it moved. He was amazed and very shocked to find a newborn baby-a little girl. Then Mr. O'Connor did something I still shake my head at when I think of it. He took the baby home to Mrs. O'Connor to try and decide what to do.**

**After a day or so they contacted Family Services in New York City and gave her over to them in hopes that the mother would be found. They also asked that if the birth family could not be located, that they might be considered as possible adoptive parents for the little girl.**

**When the TV stations interviewed the O'Connor's, they were asked why they delayed and didn't take the baby to the hospital or hand her over to the police. Mr. O'Connor replied, “I was just so shocked. I didn't expect to find a baby on my bus. I guess I wasn't thinking too**

clearly but all I could think about was getting her home. I didn't really know what to do but I know we needed to a place for her in our hearts."

The day started out routinely enough, it was just another workday for Mr. and Mrs. O'Connor. And then, most unexpectedly, an event occurred that would break into their lives and change the O'Connor's and how they experienced life forever.

In Luke's gospel we hear a story that would change the world forever. An order had gone out from the Emperor that a census should be taken and that all should go to the towns where they were originally from. This was a massive undertaking by the Roman government with people traveling great distances so that they could be counted. Joseph leaves Nazareth and travels ninety miles with Mary to Bethlehem.

It wasn't a holiday or festival that accounted for the movement and busyness of the time. It was just a regular workday with the added exasperation of having to make a trip to one's hometown so that Rome would know how many people were in its empire. The roads were clogged with travelers-mile after dusty mile walking to their destinations.

Because I grew up in the New York City suburbs, whenever I see this scene in my head I imagine something like going into Manhattan on New Year's Eve. The trains into the city are packed. People being jostled and pushed along in the excitement to get to Time's Square. You can barely walk because the crush of the people is so great. But there is energy, a pulsating push with everyone headed in the same direction. All you can see as far as your eyes take you is a sea of people.

In this push of people, this mass of humanity, we are told that Mary and Joseph stop in Bethlehem because Joseph is from the line of David and that was where he needed to register. They were looking for a place to sleep but all the lodging was taken. The only place left for them was the stall where the animals of the travelers and merchants were kept.

Here in the hustle and bustle of the Roman Empire at work, among straw and manure of the animals Mary gives birth to a son. She wraps him in swaddling clothes, a fancy term for rags, and lays the child, the

**one who later will feed the world with his body and blood, into a literal feeding trough.**

**This child who is King over all the heavens and earth, is born outside, to two peasants, in an occupied country.**

**This child, who is Lord of all creation, comes into the world and is announced not to Caesar Augustus or the powerful elite of the Empire but to some lowly shepherds, lower class laborers who were busy working in the fields with their animals.**

**This King's arrival isn't announced by some palace courtier but by an army of Angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"**

**Every time I hear the story of the birth of Christ I am shocked. I really don't know quite what to make of it. How do I make sense of a King being born into poverty? How do I make sense out of a Lord whose kingdom is made up of the poor and the outcast, the despised and the lonely, the sick and the sinners? It is so very strange and so very paradoxical.**

**I can't make sense out of it and that is one reason why I believe, with all my heart, that it is true.**

**This whole story is upside down but God came into the world to turn it upside down. God didn't come to rule over empires but to rule in our hearts.**

**God didn't come to earth to rule over earthly kingdoms, but to be with us and to tell us that there is another kingdom, a kingdom we do not expect that breaks into our every day, ordinary lives and transforms life into something beyond our imagining.**

**Who else would do that for us? For you? For me? Who else would choose to enter our pain and uncertainties, our problems and vulnerabilities? Who?**

**The One who chooses to do that is called, Emmanuel-God with us.**

**God came into the world 2000 years ago, to a little town named Bethlehem. But this is not some long ago tale, just some event that occurs in some backwater town in Palestine. This is not a story in the past tense.**

**God comes into the world tonight to share in the lives of the hungry, cold and forgotten, those who society has relegated to the stalls of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, those who no one has the time, effort or inclination to see, much less help. This is not only Christ's story; this is also their story.**

**God comes into the world tonight, to our towns and into our homes. This story is our story; in fact, it is all humanity's story.**

**We are the Mary's who are chosen to give birth to Christ in our time and place. We are the ones chosen to share with the rest of the world this amazing turn of events, this world turned upside. The audacity of the Incarnation is that God trusts us with this message, His message. God trusts that in sharing in our humanity we will in turn share his divinity.**

**We are the shepherd's, those who seek, find and share what has been made known to us about this child.**

**And sometimes we are simply the amazed ones, amazed when God breaks into our life and world in ways totally unanticipated.**

**God's arrival may be unexpected, even shocking. Like the O'Connor's, we may not expect to find a baby, a Savior, waiting for us as we go about our busy lives.**

**And like the O'Connor's we may not know what to do right away when we find Christ. But hopefully, God willing, we will know deep down inside ourselves that we need to make a place for him in our hearts.**

**And by the way, the baby on the bus...the O'Connor's welcomed her into their hearts and into their home as their daughter. A daughter they named Faith.**

**Amen.**

