

Christmas Eve Homily
John 1:1-4, 14
December 24, 2021

“Curly-Haired Boy”
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a parent’s only son, full of grace and truth.

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Long ago, on a Christmas Eve night not so different from this one, in a church with stained glass windows, candles and steeple, a congregation gathered to usher in Jesus’ birth in ritual, reading, and word. And music. But the majestic pipe organ was silent that night. It could have been water damage from a recent flood or the ravages of mice, nobody really knows, but something left the great instrument voiceless on Christmas Eve. The sound of voices, though, cut through the silence, and the gentle strumming of a lone guitar accompanied them as they sang: *Stille nacht, heil’ge nacht... Silent night, holy night, round yon godly tender pair, holy infant with curly hair, sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.* These lyrics, closer to the original German ones, sound a little different to our ears, but the sentiment is not so different: peace, heavenly peace.

Written two years earlier, after more than a decade of brutal conflict that ripped apart Europe had come to an end, Priest Joseph Mohr's poem was penned after a quiet walk in his wintry Austrian town. When the sounds of battle and the cries of hungry, frightened, beleaguered people finally died down, the whisper of snow falling on hills must have seemed like the purest sound in the world. What a relief it must have been to hear snowfall. It's no wonder that Mohr's curly-haired holy infant was born to the sound of silence.

But I struggle to imagine the scene as a noiseless one. In fact, I imagine it as a cacophony of baaing, mooing, and neighing; the cries and labored breath of a woman, the useless reassurances of a man, the shouts of "quiet" that surely came from the neighboring inn. Add to that ruckus the sound of angels' glorias, shepherds' shouts of fear, and yet more bleating from terrified sheep, and it must've been a soundtrack more akin to the freewheeling atonal music of the 20th century than a lullaby from the 19th! When you imagine the scene, what sounds fill your head? . . . Do you hear Mohr's lullaby, my atonal opus, or something with more joy, or more reverence, or more gravitas, or more celebration, or more expectation?

The truth is the events described in Luke's gospel have inspired the composition of countless carols, pop songs, symphonies, oratorios, anthems, ballets, and brass quintets in every imaginable style, from that relentless "Little Drummer Boy" to "Thistle Hair the Christmas Bear" to "Christmas Shoes." As discombobulated as our seasonal soundtrack sometimes seems, it's really a testament to the incredibly relatable message of the story that inspired all of them. A baby is born. Hope is kindled. Peace is possible. Joy is manifest. Love is embodied. Newness is embodied. Possibility is embodied. Honestly, I think that's the biggest Christmas miracle of them all: abstract concepts like love and peace take on flesh and bone and blood in the form of a babe born in humble, even

scandalous, circumstances, long ago on a night not so different from this one.

Who would that baby become? What would he do? How would he change the world? These are pregnant questions; the babe would become someone and do something and have an effect on the world, no question, but it's in the not-knowing that hope, peace, joy, and love really find soil to take root and grow.

There is so much tonight that we do not know about the future. Who will *we* be? What will *we* do? How will *we* change the world? These too are pregnant questions, containing within themselves all the possibility of Christmas itself. Tonight, on Christmas Eve, in the face of all that is still unknown, hope, peace, joy, and love seem possible, are possible. They have only to be born.

Meister Eckhart once said: "We are all mothers of God, for God is always needing to be born." Taking quick stock of the world in which we live, I doubt many would disagree that we need hope, peace, joy, and love to be born in *our* midst. So, this Christmas, let them be born in us, that we might herald glad tidings of peace on earth and goodwill to all. Christmas doesn't *just* come on a silent night as a curly-haired holy infant. Christmas is waiting to be born in us, for the sake of our world. May it be so.

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

*Whether we hear the sounds of angels,
the steady beat of a drum,
the noise of birth and animals,
or the whisper of snowfall,
we know, O God, that there is something special about tonight.
We know that the earth itself is pregnant:
that hope, peace, joy, and love are waiting to be born.*

*Where wars rage or violence dominates,
division grows or hatred smolders,
need overwhelms or grief consumes,
illness surges or fatigue weighs heavy,
may Christmas come.*

*Where dreams grow dim,
where disappointments eclipse accomplishments,
where stress overshadows merriment,
where reality overtakes possibility,
may Christmas come.*

*We know that the earth itself is pregnant:
that hope, peace, joy, and love are waiting to be born.
May they be born in and through us,
for the sake of our world,
that songs of peace on earth and goodwill among all
might be sung this and every night.*

Amen.