

Christmas Eve B
John 1:1-5, 14
December 24, 2023

“Dangerous Hope”
Rev. Brandon S. Perrine

I have always loved Christmas Eve. As a kid, I knew that Santa would come during the night and there would be plenty of presents for opening the next morning. On Christmas Eve, though, we would each be given the one present from Mom and Dad. It would be the only gift *they* would give us that year and it was always something really special. One Christmas Eve, I unwrapped a nativity scene. It’s a wonderful little set and includes Mary and Joseph, a manger, little Jesus, one shepherd, three wise men, a cow, a donkey, two sheep, an angel, and a bark and moss stable. It’s made of cast resin – I think that’s another word for plastic – and it was designed by Italian artisans, and hand-painted in China.

That nativity is still one of my most treasured possessions. I never add the baby Jesus until Christmas Day. Throughout Advent, as I look at that empty manger and the expressions on the faces of the little figures surrounding it, something is invariably triggered deep inside me, and more so this year than ever. That “something” is hope. The figures that, come Christmas morning, will be gazing in transfixed adoration at the just-added Christ Child, stare now at an empty manger – their little plastic faces full of expectation and anticipation. Something wonderful is coming. Hope is about to be born.

Believe it or not, hope is a dangerous thing. It’s dangerous to those who hold power over the hopeful. It’s dangerous to leaders, governments, and institutions who hold back hopeful people with unjust laws or oppressive systems. It’s dangerous because hope dares *us* to believe that things can be different; that a baby can grow up and change the world; that a new

and better world *is* possible where the hungry can be filled, the weeping can laugh, outsiders become insiders, and the poor inherit the very kingdom of heaven.

This kind of hope – Christmas Hope – is a dangerous thing. Jesus would learn that. And Jesus would learn that there can be a high price to pay for giving people hope. But tonight, hope comes to us anyway, despite the cost, in the shape of a small, fragile, vulnerable infant, born to poor parents, through scandalous circumstances, in a smelly stable, as real flesh and bone and blood. Hope is being born.

And so, as Charles Wesley once wrote:

*Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.*

Let's welcome it. Let's nurture it. Let's cherish it. Let's share it. A babe in a manger is a beautiful thing, but if that was the end of the story, we would not have reason for Christmas Hope. Hope grows. Hope spreads. Hope changes the world.

Indeed, we are called to expect Christmas Hope and Peace and Joy and Love in and for our world, and we are called to be the very ones – the hands and hearts and mouths – to herald them to our world. Hope, Christmas Hope, dangerous hope is being born again this night. May it be born in us for the sake of our world. Amen.