

**Christmas Eve Meditations**  
**Christmas Eve, 2008**  
**Written by Kim Mason & Rev. Bob Janis-Dillon**  
**Told by Bob, Kim, Lissa Richardson, Marshall Gordeuk, & Renata Denlinger**

**The Story of the Parents**

*A reading from the Book of Luke: So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

Reader lights advent candle, congregation responds: “I will light candles of hope where despair keeps watch.”

In many ways we are like any other new parents with their first child. You worry about the birth. You worry that the child will be healthy. You worry whether you’ll know what to do when the baby won’t stop crying, when the baby gets sick, when the baby – well you name it – we worried about it. And on top of all that we worried about the child – this child of god. What does it mean? What will happen? Are we the right people to raise this special child?

Yet through all that there is hope. This is our first child. This is a blessed event if for no other reason than it is the birth of a child. We are looking forward to welcoming this child into our home and making a family. We have prepared a space and shared our joy with our friends and family. Sure, it’s a little unusual to bear the child of god, but families come in all shapes and sizes, ways and composition. So there is hope too for the future.

It was hope that got us through that long journey back to Bethlehem. What truly awful timing. Only hope got us through that cold night in the barn. It certainly makes a story to tell, how we ended up sleeping with the animals and in all the stress of travel and taxes, the child was born. You might wonder how we survived, but it was hope that filled our hearts as this new life joined ours. We don’t know what the future will bring – I guess no parent does. But we have hope – hope for this child, hope for this family and hope for all of us.

**The Story of the Sheep**

*A reading from the Book of Luke: And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour,*

*which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will towards men."*

Reader lights advent candle, congregation responds: "I will light candles of love to inspire all my living"

I know what you humans say about us sheep, behind our backs: that we are stupid and meek, that we are mere followers, that we don't know anything beyond what's right in front of us. But I also know when the day grows dark and the cold sets in, it is us that you turn to for warmth.

I have had many coats. I have clothed merchants and maidens, singers and sailors. Every person who has felt my wool against their skin has also had cause to feel gratitude inside for the gift my coat brings.

And I'll tell you one more thing: I have heard the angels sing.

It happened out in the fields. I was surrounded by my sisters and brothers, and my cousins the shepherds when they appeared: the night above us, previously dotted with a scattering of stars, was filled, end to end, with the heavenly host. They sang of tidings of great joy, peace to all people. And I think maybe they meant us sheep too: for they were not talking in the terms of divisions and categories, but in words of love. They sang about a baby that would change the world, and we knew, hearing the song, that we could be a part of it.

And we did our share of singing, too, once we got over our fear, bleating into the night, proclaiming that a child was born. Listening to angels would change our lives, we knew that much. A journey lay in front of us: and at the end a gift: we would offer our wool coats to a little baby, who would one day be a shepherd. My coat would become his coat, and he would know the world was a place that offered warmth from the cold. He would feel the warmth of my coat as he grew stronger, older, and it would help him grow into the adult that he wanted to be. I may not be able to know just what his life will bring, but I can at least help him on his journey. You might think we did not know, that night, what lay in front of us, but what we knew was a kernel of the deepest truth of Christmas: there is singing out there, if you can hear it, and there is warmth enough to cover the deepest night. We heard the singing in our hearts, and we gave what we could give.

### **"The Story of the Wise"**

*A reading from the Book of Matthew: After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory -- this was during Herod's kingship -- a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the east. They asked around, "Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed the star in the eastern sky that signaled His birth. We're*

*on a pilgrimage to worship Him.” When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified...*

Reader lights advent candle, congregation responds: “I will light candles of joy despite all sadness.”

I am not what you might call a winter person. Winter is a time I like to curl up by the fire with a good book, and wish I was curled up on the beach with a good book instead. But there’s no getting away from it: the sun is far away, and the night comes early, and I have to take what I can get.

As you have heard from the story, along with my colleagues I travelled a great distance one winter to see a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, laying a manger. It was a long way to go, and we received no reward that can be measured. Why did we make the journey? Why did we brave the cold?

We came to see a baby; we came to greet a king. We came bearing gifts, because when someone is important you find a way to say so. What that child eventually did with that gold, frankincense and myrrh, I’ll never know – and in fact it doesn’t really matter. What was important was that we recognized that night as a holy night, and paid tribute to a child who brings peace.

There are a million, million stars out there, and each surely leads somewhere. Probably there’s a star out there for each of us. I know many stars by name, and even more I’ll never know. This star was a new star. The star we followed spoke to us of new beginnings.

It was a hard journey we made, one I probably won’t take again. But I don’t regret it. I knew, seeing that child, that the journey doesn’t end with me, and I was glad of it. I brought gifts that would stay with the family long after I left. And after following the star for many nights, I saw a different light: the twinkle in the eyes of a little baby. And to see the light in another’s eyes, and to pay tribute to that light, is to witness the wonder of the heavens.

### **The Story of the Baby**

*A reading from the Book of Isaiah: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”*

Reader lights advent candle, congregation responds: “I will light candles of peace for tempest-tossed days”.

He was born that Christmas night, in a manger, underneath a star. What was that little baby thinking, who was to be called wonderful counselor, prince of peace? We don’t know. We don’t know what any baby is thinking, let alone a holy baby.

This baby would grow up, according to the story of Christmas, to bring a voice of peace to a stormy world. He would tell those around him that we should love our neighbors as ourselves, love even our enemies, and be makers of peace. All this from a little boy born in the midst of a manger, a long way from his parents' home, after an arduous journey.

It couldn't have been all that peaceful there, in the midst of all the hubbub and the confusion. He had animals for his neighbors, and there were guests that came from all over, stomping into the manger and proclaiming glad tidings. If Jesus was like the rest of us as little babies, that first day must have been pretty confusing regardless of who was there: surrounded by noises and sensations, only beginning to develop sight and hearing, the newborn has no hope of making sense of it all. All the newborn can do is find solace where solace is to be found, and wait for things to pass.

But maybe it *was* like the beautiful pictures in the advent calendars, the babe in the manger with the peaceful family and friends around him. I like to think that, on that very first Christmas, the baby Jesus found a little bit of that peace that we're all looking for. That there was a moment where peace was recognized- maybe when the baby reached out and felt the wool of the sheep beside him, or smelled frankincense and myrrh, or heard someone who loved him singing his name, and in that moment, the baby Jesus knew *exactly* what peace was all about. And maybe the prince of peace began to learn about peace on that very first night – and maybe we can all learn peace, in the midst of Christmastime.