

Christmas Eve  
Luke 2:1-20  
Dec 24, 2022  
Mary Barnett

We do this annotated bulletin two or three times a year.

It's an attempt to provide some historical and contemporary commentary of what we do in worship....please look at it and let me know what you think.

But first here is the spark notes version.

*God loves you. You are meant to be here. You are welcome as you are. The act of confession is not accusing you of sinning in some shaming puritanical way...even though it may sound like it is... but reminding you that whatever you've done or left undone..you can say you are sorry and mean it and you can start again. There is healing available, right here.*

*Oh and even though we still say "He" alot...we do not believe God is an old man in the sky, looking down on you and judging. You are made in the image of God (whatever that means) as are all the wonders of the earth which frankly means that in some way God looks like you and is beautiful. And you as you are ...are a temple of the holy spirit. A manger in which a miracle is being born every day. A barn that harbors heaven. And The church is here to remind you of that. However...over the centuries, the church has frequently done a really bad job of this, because the church like us is human. It grabs power. It wants its own way. It gets mad.*

*Nonetheless.*

*The church is still standing after all these centuries to remind you that the divine spirit lives within you. The divine spirit that in some sense is you. But as you will find out a lot of things can get in the way of our experiencing that. And the church when it is working right is here for that too.*

*And...it matters to God what we do. Today. Begin again. No matter what has happened in the past and no matter what will happen in the future, resurrection always happen in the present moment. So fear not. You are a beloved child of God*

*The annotated bulletin did not make all that perfectly clear, so I felt I must.*

*What the bulletin did say this: "The Eucharist is a service that sets aside time as we know it.*

Now...that's a pretty tall order and I need some help with that. It is certainly not something I can do alone. So come : *Breathe in breathe out.* Let the cold stay outside. Put down the half wrapped christmas presents. The worrisome travel plans. The semester ahead. The non-functional turkey baster. And just breathe. Come let us worship.

The Eucharist brings both past (The Hebrew's past, Jesus's past, our past) and the future (what we can only hope for although Jesus tells us it is somehow *already here* and what the scriptures may mean by heaven) to present reality: right here right now as we remember Jesus's life death resurrection and coming again...together . This is a drama that requires our participation or the transformation will not take place.

What do you remember? The baby lying in the manger. Chubby arms and cheeks and your heart breaking. Finding god in the little things as Morley preached last week? Do you remember that Jesus's was born into a poor family on the very margins of society and that that matters. As theologian John Sabrino writes: *The poor are the primary recipients of the Good News because they understand it better than anyone else.*

Do you remember that Jesus's preaching, teaching and healing is told somewhat differently by Mark and Mathew and John and Luke and Paul which ultimately may mean that it will take the whole world, everyone, to preach the whole Gospel? Do you remember the affront that Jesus's very being was to the established religious and political order in first century Palestine? And then remember people in our own day, in our own churches who have been seen as affronts to the established order of the church? Do you remember then how Jesus turned over the tables of that order and how they put him to death for it? Do you remember how he healed the lame and the blind and the selfish? Do you remember perhaps how once he healed you?

Tonight as we lay aside time as we know it, we invite this whole drama to unfold again. What does it ask you to remember?

This past week I saw the musical *Come from Away* at the Bushnell. It is based on the events that took place on the island of Newfoundland during the week following the

**September 11 attacks.** While everyone was scrambling trying to figure out what had just happened in NYC, American airspace was cleared, and Canada generously welcomed us in.

In the course of the next three hours: 38 jumbo jets, four military flights, hundreds of crew, 6,759 passengers, 9 cats, 11 dogs, and two Bonobos— landed on the runways at Gander, on the island of Newfoundland. For the initial 24 hours, no one was allowed to leave the planes. There was fear and confusion: customs and security had to be put in place to assure no terrorists were on board. Remember? Meanwhile the passengers did not know where they were or why they were there or what was happening in NY. Less than 50% of people at the time had cell phones.

Then there was also a situation brewing in Gander itself. There was a real risk that the weight of the planes would sink the runway, damage the airport and the planes would be stuck permanently. And what to do with all these people? The number of passengers doubled the population of the island.

Oh...and the school bus drivers were striking.

The people gathered at the airport to stare at the planes. The people on the planes stared out the windows at the people. The mayor did whatever mayor's do in a situation like this that has never happened before. It was a stalemate. And the striking school bus drivers put down their picket signs.

Now, I'm not particularly involved in the labor movement. I just protest a lot around my house. I have been known to carry invisible signs, proclaiming my point of view because I need to be right about something. But in the play when the striking bus drivers put their own needs aside to serve others something old in me just let go.

Schools were converted into makeshift shelters. Restaurants and bakeries donated food, pharmacies filled 2,000 prescriptions in the middle of the night and provided everything from diapers to toothbrushes to feminine products to nicotine patches to...(shrug) Perfect strangers were invited into people's homes "That will be \$9.99" the check out lady at Walmart said. "And hey...Do you want to come stay with us?"

The police chief's teenage daughter created a pop up Disneyworld at ST Paul's Intermediate school for a small group terminally-ill children who were flying from London to Florida for their birthdays.

The creators of the play tried as best they could to stick to what actually happened and the real people involved. They used people's real names and real words when possible and they resolutely kept the story focused on the whole community instead of just on the prime time worthy few. They tried it out at the town first and asked for feedback. But it's a story, a story in a frame, meant to help us see something we couldn't see any other way. But it's not the whole story. It couldn't be. It's a moment in time, in a time set apart. just as our Gospels are. Just like this service is.

And here is a larger truth. Transformative dramas aren't just about what happens on stage anymore than the Eucharist can be transformative if it is just about what happens on the altar. Watching the play, particularly the fear attached to one of the Muslim passengers, I remembered something. something I'd completely forgotten and it shook me in my seat.

In the aftermath of 9/11, I developed an irrational fear of going into one particular convenience store in Branford. I had little babies with me and it had once crossed my mind that it would be a good place for someone to blow up. So I stopped going.

And suddenly it is my side that is pierced and blood and water and tears came running out

Could it be that we, all of us have been **crouching in some kind of trauma reaction of fear ever since 9/11? And now laid on top of that is Covid and war and financial worries and political divisions, all whipped up into a frenzy by various outside forces? We are haunted by scary strangers in masks who turn out to be ourselves.**

Richard Rohr writes:

**Remember, it's God in us that loves God. We on our own don't really know how to love God. It's Christ in us that recognizes Christ. We on our own don't know how to recognize Christ. And it's the Holy Spirit, *whose temple we are* that responds to the Holy Spirit.**

We who once were strangers can become friends. We have all been adopted into the same human family, by a God who came down to earth to be with us.

*Fear not* Gabriel says to Mary

*Fear not* the angel says to Joseph.

*Fear not* say the angels to the shepherds

*Do not be afraid little flock* Jesus says for your father is pleased to give you the kingdom.

**for**

The people have walked in darkness for such a long time

And the people who walked in the darkness

have seen a great light;

For unto us a child is born and you will find him warped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger

Even now, even here:

Here in Middletown on Dec 25 2022 in this time and place set apart: on those who have lived long in a land of deep darkness— on them a great light has shined.

Amen