

**CHRISTMAS DAY**  
**Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12); John 1:1-14**  
**The Rev. Danée Ashley**  
**December 25, 2015, 10:00 am**

Merry Christmas! How many Christmases do you think we've seen between us all? 800? 900? 1000? Even though we know the story, something keeps us coming to church on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day over and over again, like a child reading a favorite book. What is it about this story of God's love that makes us want to hear it again and again? What brings you here this morning? Out of the million of other things that you could do, you are here. Why?

During this holy time, we can look around and see many things wrong with the way our American culture celebrates: we spend too much, we worry too much, we eat too much, and perhaps sentimentalize or romanticize what we think happened in Christmases past. Even though we are wading through a sea of excesses to get to the manger, our instincts for the divine, for the holy, are spot on. We are hungry. We want to be transformed like old Mr. Scrooge in Dickens' tale. We are hungry to give to others, but deeper still is the desperate hunger to receive.

Now we're not comfortable with this need. We prefer to believe that we are self-sufficient, benevolent, competent people who can make things happen. And yet, in our Gospel stories, God comes to us—the Word made flesh—as an infant. An infant who is helpless and dependent on his parents to care for him. We did not make that happen. God created recipients when this gift was given. We did not invent or approve or perhaps even like this gift, but it was given to us anyway.

I wonder: if God would have come to people as a mild-mannered, reasonably attractive person in middle age who spoke reason to us about what was going on in the world and offered solutions on how to change it, would anyone have listened? Instead, God sends these strange and startling gifts that we hear about in Advent—John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness—wild of hair and wild of face; and now at Christmas, an infant mewling in a stable, born of a virgin mother, with angels in attendance. Whether you like babies or not, a crying infant is difficult to ignore!

These are our Christmas gifts that touch us in profound ways. God pricked us with the needle of love that has opened our hearts to receive it. This gift is where discipleship comes from. God loved us first so that we could love others. We have the "love others" part down in many ways, but being able to receive love—that's where we get uncomfortable. John Wesley once wrote that, "Nothing is more repugnant to capable, reasonable people than grace." Grace makes us feel awkward inside and we often shove it away because we don't know what to do with it.

Yet, here it comes, poking its nose out of the box we put it away in, tip-toeing into our lives until we remember again—the star, the manger, the angels, the baby. Jesus—Immanuel—God with us. This is why we come, year after year. This is why we want to hear the story over and over again. "This is the irrational season," Madeleine L'Engle writes, "when love blooms bright and wild. Had Mary been filled with reason/there'd have been no room for the child."

May we all bloom bright and wild by remembering each day this gift of love from God. Merry Christmas! Amen.