

JUST IN TIME
Rev. Gregory Flint
December 24, 2009
Christmas Eve, 10 pm service

“Joseph,” she says, “it’s time. My water has broken.”

But in Bethlehem the inn is full.

“Mary,” he says, “There’s no room for us. Can you wait a little longer while I look for another place?”

“No,” she whispers. “It’s time....”

“Mary,” he says, “There’s a stable near.”

She just nods.

“And while they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child,” it says - words that are the essence of this night.

So, in the darkness of a Judean night, in the musty earthiness of an outback stable, midst flicking tails and shuffling hooves, with large moist animal eyes watching, there is the panting of a young woman in labor.

In the distance a dog barks, a mouse scampers across the straw, the young woman pushes for all she is worth, and a child is born. For it’s time....

And time tonight for you and I to breathe deeply again. For all the preparations of these past weeks are either done or not. Now we can let go and just settle into the mystery of this night, in which time grows still, like the surface of a pond in which you can see your reflection but also something deep and timeless.

Tonight, you see, we are not on clock time, but in timeless time - God’s time.

And nothing is merely ordinary tonight – a lighted tree, altar candles, laughter, tears, memories, the clasp of someone’s hand, human faces, bread shared, a carol sung. It all hints of holiness, as if heaven and earth mingle. The Realm of God feels real and close tonight.

For tonight, it’s time...to see again: the sacred in the commonplace; the glory everywhere; an angel in one’s path; a Savior in the straw.

It’s time tonight, to feel again the wonder of living. That it’s all miracle and gift really: heartbeat and breath; feelings and yearnings; hunger and satisfaction; song and relationship; intimacy and imagination; this moment to be and the next.

For the world can be hard on our sense of ourselves. Everyday, in a hundred ways, we are reminded that we could do better, do more, have more, are entitled, that we should be other than we are. But tonight, in a Bethlehem stable, a young peasant woman cradles her Child in a manger, and it is somehow validation of our own lives. Tonight, it’s time. And our souls know our worth.

And we come here tonight out of December’s darkness with all our human askings, even anguish, about the senseless, unjust, even terror-filled, death-wielding, and grief-making things in the world and in our lives. And

the voices have been loud; of those telling us how much there is to fear: enemies to fear; government to fear; political differences to fear; immigrants to fear; a changing world to fear.

Or there's the fear of not having enough. Or the fear of loss, loneliness, pain. Fear of what other's will think, fear of the unknown and of the future. Fear of dying, fear of living.

But tonight we hear the Story again, of shepherds watching and angels singing. And our fears draw back; at least enough to believe again, that there is Something – a Power of Goodness – at the core of the universe – a God even of your life and mine, with Whom our struggles matter.

And tonight, gathered as we are, all those things that divide and alienate people from one another loose importance. Tonight we can let go of old hurt and anger. For what is important tonight is risking love and forgiveness again. What is important tonight is believing again that there is a Greater Power of Goodness at the core of the universe. What matters tonight is knowing that there is a God of all who uses compassion and generosity, sharing and song, prayer and even small efforts of human peace-making to heal the world.

For what this night really is about is hope – the reach of our souls toward goodness and beauty. And, oh how we need this Christmas rebirth of hope – don't we? It's time....

So, in the still point of this night, there is the light of a single lantern in a Bethlehem stable. And there is the mother, propped up by a bale of straw, looking with wonderment at a Baby cradled in the Manger.

“Jesus,” she whispers the Child's name.

Joseph kneels beside the mother and child. “Mary, thank God we made it here in time,” he says.

And this night there is also you and I. And the Story of this Bethlehem Birth seems tonight to be the thing of all things most worth believing in.

So we say it softly to each other: “Merry Christmas. Thank God, we made it to this night, just in time.”