

1st Sunday after Christmas
Isaiah 61:10-62:3, Psalm 147
John 1: 1-18

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St. Peter's Glenside
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Linger at the Stable

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. AMEN

Good morning. Merry Christmas! In these dwindling days of a decade that straddle the miracle of Christmas and the beginning of a new year, let us linger for a moment at the stable and revel in wonder and awe at what has just happened. It is too easy to race right by and be consumed by the 24/7 nature of our lives and the bullying of schedules and responsibilities.

I was reminded of this a few nights ago when my neighbor stopped to visit while walking his yellow lab. He spoke of the beauty of the candlelight Christmas Eve service, the sweet sounds of "Silent Night" and the enormity of his heart's "Thank you" at the hymn's conclusion.

Yes, I thought silently. "Thank you, God." But before I could say a word, he continued. "I say 'thank you' every time because I'm grateful nothing caught on fire. People are pressed so closely together that I'm always afraid someone's hair is going to burst into flame. One of the things I did when I was on the Vestry was get the candles out of little kids' hands."

My neighbor is a surgeon and I'd want my surgeon to be thinking of all the potential for disaster, to be highly attuned to every eventuality every minute of his day.

We come to the stable just as we are with the demands and stress of our lives alongside of us which can mask the miracle, wonder, and awe that we are asked to behold that is waiting for us at the manger.

Our lives are so rooted in reason and prose that it's natural to overlook how often God speaks to us in poetry. Job bludgeoned God for answers, reason, and explanation. God answered in gorgeous poetry.

Some ask the same of Christmas. Could a virgin give birth? Did it really happen in December? Or was it July? What matters is that happened in poetry, not prose.

Let us linger at the stable for a few moments this morning with the late poet, philosopher and theologian, John O'Donohue, an Irish Catholic priest for nearly two decades, before he left the church to marry and teach. He died suddenly in 2008 at 52. O'Donohue reminds us of the wonder of this season: (quote)

At Christmas, time deepens. The Celtic imagination knew that time is eternity in disguise. They embraced the day as a sacred space. Christmas reminds us to glory in the simplicity and wonder of one day; it unveils the extraordinary that our hurried lives conceal and neglect.

We have been given such immense possibilities. We desperately need to make clearances in our entangled lives to let our souls breathe. (unquote)

What we breathe in with the birth of a child is wonder, intimacy, and possibility. We are awestruck. A wild imagination is unleashed. Hearts soar when our eyes behold what love has created.

I knew that when I held my daughter for the first time, and then again, earlier this year when I held her daughter, my granddaughter, for the first time on a wintry February morning. It was, and remains, a moment of supreme tenderness and transcendence when heaven and earth embrace. Miracle is too small a word.

It is hard to think of a more intimate moment. O'Donohue, who writes lyrically of the wonder of the soul and it's longing for beauty, captured it this way in an interview with Krista Tippett in her radio broadcast – On Being— (quote)

There is a place in you where you have never been wounded, where there is still a sureness in you, where there's a seamlessness in you, and where there is a confidence and tranquility in you. And I think the intention of

prayer and spirituality and love is now and again to visit that inner kind of sanctuary. (unquote)

It is also the sanctuary of the stable. The place where love came down from heaven and was born among us. Everything we cherish today began two thousand years ago at the manger. Writes O'Donohue:

What I love is that at the heart of Christianity, you have this idea of intimacy, which is true belonging, being seen, the ultimate home of individuation, the ultimate source of it and the homecoming — that that's what I would call spirituality, is the art of homecoming... So it's St. Augustine's phrase, "God is more intimate to me than I am to myself."

Imagine: God is more intimate to me than I am to myself. Only poetry can fathom the mystery of those words. The intimacy of our belonging to God begins at the manger. Our intimacy with a God who "...counts the numbers of the stars and calls them all by their names" in the poetic words of Psalm 147 this morning. John tells us of the light that came into the world with Christ, a light that pierces the darkness which the darkness could not overcome.

The Magi followed a star to lead them to the manger, and there, they found the light-- the miraculous light of the word made flesh in a God more intimate with us than we are to ourselves.

Embrace this miracle for a moment. The world will come rushing in again at us all. It happened at the manger, too. Within days, Mary and Joseph were on the run, fleeing into Egypt, because Joseph was warned in a dream of Herod's murderous plans for the baby Jesus.

But before that happens, and even after it does, revel in the wonder, the awe, and rejoice, over and over again.

In her poem "First Coming," poet Madelene L'Engle writes:

He did not wait till the world was ready,
till men and nations were at peace.
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.
He came when the need was deep and great.
He dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine.

He did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy he came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame
he came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh
the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

AMEN