

Christmas Eve - 2016

It is really such a simple story.

The part we know best is a mere 17 sentences.

A pregnant young woman.

A couple expecting their first child.

A forced migration.

No room when the time comes for her to have her baby.

Truth be told, that is not a new or a newsworthy story.

How many times over the course of human history, to say nothing of the last 24 hours, has this part of the story taken place?

But there is something more here, isn't there.

Meaning and hope layered over that all too common event.

Holy messengers who sing about *Peace on Earth*.

The baby who is born known not just as Jesus, but as *Emmanuel* which, as you know, means *God with us*.

With you. With me.

Right here. Right now.

In the craziness and complexity and wonder of life as it is and the world as it is.

And, what about this?

These words written long before Jesus was born, but which tradition has linked to the witness and the promise and the meaning of his life. From the Jewish prophet Isaiah:

For to us a child is born,

To us a son is given;

And his name will be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

And this...

He shall judge between the nations and shall decide for many peoples;

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,

And their spears into pruning hooks;

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

Neither shall they learn war any more.

There is a holiday car commercial on TV right now with the tag line:

If you are going to wish, wish big.

So, if there ever was a night for wishing and dreaming...

In the beauty of this place

Amidst the candles and the carols and our singing *Silent Night* together

I would say this to you.

This Christmas, if you are going to dream, dream big.

Please.

Don't settle for Santa or visions of sugar plums or a Merry Christmas.

I am not stretching the truth to say...
I...we...the world needs more than that.
Looks for and longs for, and when it can, hopes for more than that.

Today more than ever, the world needs brave people willing to dream big dreams.
Dreams big enough and bold enough to stand alongside the witness of the angels and the vision of the prophets and against all those forces which would demean and destroy and demonize any of God's children. And instead find ways to wage peace and to build hope.
Dreams big enough and bold enough to risk being God's presence, risk being *Emmanuel* with all that implies, to those who need it the most. Being hope and compassion and kindness and community with and for the forgotten and the lonely and the hungry and the stranger.
Swords into plowshares.
Spears into pruning hooks.
Peace on earth.
Good will among all the children of God...which, in the end, includes all of us.

Too much to wish for?
To hope for?
Too much for you?
For us?
I wonder...

And, so it is Christmas.
Once again.
And, that tantalizing dream of God comes to us wrapped up in the birth a child.