

the QUIET collection

for Christmas

Day 6: New

Now in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone was on his way to register for the census each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem because he was of the house and family of David in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth, and she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. — Luke 2:1-7

This is the word of the Lord. Christmas this year will be different. Sure, our living rooms might look familiar. The lights strung same as last year, the traditions resembling the outline of holidays past. As we go, we'll search for comfort and joy beneath piles of paper and distance gatherings, but we can't decorate our way over the grief.

This account in Luke two of the birth of Jesus is so familiar, we may have memorized the words without even trying. Even though the words are the same, every year Emmanuel continues to mean something different. Not that he changes, but that we do. Life peels back more layers, and we're left standing raw until they heal, but God coming down to this gritty, dusty land of the dying makes every difference in our hope for living.

He is with us. He is in us. He is here.

Every year, December comes and though it carries all the things we've come to expect, it also always brings something new. Sometimes the newness is welcome, a new relationship, a new baby, a new job, house or experience. Other times, like maybe this year, the newness is more difficult. A new diagnosis, a new disappointment, a new fear or uncertainty, or the first Christmas without him. We've come to expect the word new to imply something good and loss to imply something bad, but in fact, these two words both carry a fair share of hope and of grief.

And so we wait together, even as we move into all the news of December, both the kind announced in the headlines of the paper and the kind that hangs like a banner over our soul. We're not sure how to do this thing called grief, especially at this time of year. How do you hold the memories without falling apart?

How do you welcome the new things when the old things are preferred? We can't detour around this brokenness. The only way out is to walk right through. In the midst of my own questions, I return to the rhythm of our days and of our nights.

Did you know that the day is day, but there are phases of night. The morning Twilight is usually called dawn and the night Twilight we call dusk. But then there are phases of Twilight, depending on how far the sun is below the horizon. There's civil, nautical and astronomical Twilight. I know those are scientific

words, but they also seem metaphorically significant. Civil Twilight is not pitch black. We can still deal with the shadows. Nautical Twilight sounds romantic, darker, but you can finally see the stars. But astronomical dawn and dusk, that's the time of night before the sun rises or after it sets when the sky is as dark as it gets with no glow on the horizon. If you're going to lose your bearings, this would be the time.

I wonder if you're in a civil Twilight today, not pitch-black, but seeing by shadows. Or maybe a nautical Twilight, keenly aware of the stars. Some of us might find ourselves today in an astronomical dawn or dusk. You don't know which side of the darkness you're on. Are you closer to the dusk or closer to the dawn? Is the longest night finally behind you? Is the sun about to come up?

And just when this kind of darkness seems too extremely large and exceedingly great to handle, I learned this one simple line about the nighttime scientists. They're called the astronomers and their work thrives in darkness. In fact, they wait patiently for true darkness because only when the night is black, can their observations finally begin.

As we consider how Christmas might be different for us this year, perhaps we might learn from the nighttime scientists and lean into this unknown space. What observations might you make in the darkness? What new thing might emerge from this night?

While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth, and she gave birth to her firstborn son and she wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. This is the word of the Lord. It is absolutely true and given to us in love.