

PRAYER: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel. Amen.

“Tell Us About God. We Have Almost Forgotten”

There's a story that I love to tell and this is the season for telling stories. I first heard it from a seminary professor but, I'm not sure that this story actually happened, but I am sure that it is absolutely true! It's a story about a three-year-old girl who was the only child in her family. Her mom is pregnant, and this three-year-old girl is very excited about having a baby in the house. The day comes where the mom and dad go off to the hospital. A couple of days later they come home with a new baby brother. And the little girl is just delighted. But after they've been home for a couple of hours, the little girl tells her parents that she wants to be with the baby in the baby's room, alone. And she insists that the door be shut. It kind of gives her parents butterflies. They know she's a good little girl, but they've heard about sibling rivalry and they're not sure about what they should do. Then they remember that they've recently installed an intercom system in preparation for the arrival of the new baby, and they realize that they can let their little girl do this, and if they hear the slightest strange thing happening, they can be in there in a flash.

So, they let their little girl go into the room. They close the door behind her. They race to the intercom. They hear her footsteps move across the room. They imagine her now standing over the baby's crib, and then they hear her say to her two-day-old baby brother, “tell me about God. I've almost forgotten.”

People of God, we are all that child, standing over the baby's crib hoping against hope that the newborn baby will tell us about God; maybe because we have almost forgotten, maybe because we don't believe, maybe because we want to believe, maybe because we've lost hope, maybe because we are endlessly curious, or maybe just because of the season of waiting!

Regardless of why, here we are gazing into the crib at the newborn baby hoping that this child will tell us about God. But all we have is this story; a story so simple it sounds as if it was created for children; poor homeless refugees, far from home, in the darkness of a winter's night, struggling to keep warm amongst the dung of a stable, a tiny baby, swaddled in what we imagine as rags and lying in a feed trough, shepherds, angels and a star in the night sky. It's a lovely story. A story that warms our hearts, told over and over again in the darkness of so many winters as we struggle to keep our struggles and challenges at bay. We've told it so often that we've forgotten why it was told in the first place. We've lugged so much of our own baggage into that stable that we can scarcely see the baby. We've heaped our expectations and longings onto the images and our need to know has demanded that the facts confirm our desires.

So, the experts, the theologians, the historians, the archeologists, astronomers, astrologists, physicians and especially the clergy have been enlisted to substantiate the facts. Tell us about God we demand! We've almost forgotten. Tell us that, there really was a star. Tell us that, a virgin can conceive. Tell us that, there was a census. Identify the wise guys. Integrate the shepherds. Gather the evidence. Establish the facts. Tell us about God. We've almost forgotten and it's cold, and it's dark and we are sore afraid.

We've almost forgotten why the stories were created in the first place. We've certainly forgotten who created them. We don't know their names so we call them Matthew and Luke. We suspect that the stories did the rounds before they were finally written down some fifty or so years after Jesus of Nazareth walked the earth. We know that the stories are very different one from another. They simply don't agree on the details. We know that there is no evidence that any of Jesus' contemporaries knew these stories. The apostle Paul never mentioned them. The writer of the earliest Gospel, the one we call Mark, never mentions these stories, nor does the writer of the Fourth Gospel the one we call John.

We only know that the details of these stories are very similar to the details of other ancient birth stories, like the ones that are told about Caesar Augustus, and Alexander the Great. Our fear has almost caused us to forget the reality that these stories may not have happened exactly this way, but they are always happening this way. We've almost forgotten that the creators of these stories wrote them for very particular reasons. They had a legacy to contend with; the legacy of a man who came along and changed everything. Jesus of Nazareth had turned their world upside down.

Jesus had challenged and changed the rules. Every once in a long while, someone comes along who changes everything. In this ever-evolving creation in which we live, there are times when creatures take a giant leap in a new direction. Someone or

something happens upon the scene and the evolution of our species is shaped for a new kind of development. Jesus was that kind of event. Jesus, broadened the horizons of the people of the first century and moved a large section of the population toward a way of being in the world that began to break down tribal barriers, that called for a kind of peace that cannot be achieved at the edge of a sword; the kind of peace that comes only through justice. Jesus challenged the religious rules and regulations and opened people up to a way of connecting to the sacred. Jesus embodied a way of being that not only rejected violence, by challenging people not to hate and beyond that to have hearts of forgiveness and mercy.

Jesus challenged people not just to love the loveable, but to love their enemies. Jesus embodied a way of being that rejected greed, by challenging people not to steal, and beyond that, challenging people to not even desire the things that were not theirs, and to give; give until everyone's needs are met. Jesus embodied a way of being that embraced the poor, the outsider, the despised, the marginalized, and even the foreigner. Jesus embodied a vision of the Divine One; our God who will not be confined by the religious authorities; our God who dwells in us, with us, through us, and beyond us.

Jesus lived and moved in the religious traditions of his people and took them beyond the limitations of their visions of God, and opened them to possibilities so earth-shattering that his embodiment of the sacred threatened the status quo and frightened the religious and political establishment. So, they killed him. But Jesus' embodiment of the sacred would not die in the hearts and minds of those whose lives had been opened to the possibilities of a new way of being in the world. In Jesus, the world saw the fullness of human possibility: to make God visible in our lives. In Jesus the world came to see the Emmanuel, God with us.

This is the legacy that the creators of the stories about Jesus' birth wanted all the world to know about. So, they wrote it all down, so that the people would understand. They made the stories about his birth so simple that even children could understand them. They wrote them in the style of their time. They included details that would alert their listeners to the revolutionary nature of the life of this man who embodied the divine so fully, so completely and so radically different than anyone they had ever known. The radical nature of Jesus' challenges caused a shift in our evolution as a species. Our vision has been forever expanded. Our hopes and dreams for justice, peace, compassion, and love were nourished and enlivened by the way in which Jesus embodied the sacred; the One who is the source and ground of our being; that which we call God.

Jesus gave us a wonderful human expression of the Divine who lives and breathes in, with, and through us. In Jesus, we can see the endless possibilities of life in communion with God and with one another. In Jesus, we can see a vision of the Reign of God that includes all of Creation. In Jesus, we can see the hope and the joy of living fully into our own humanity. In the life of Jesus, we can see a glimpse of what it means to live abundantly and be all that we are created to be. By his life and his love, his openness to the sacred and his embrace of his own humanity, Jesus challenges us all to love extravagantly, and live fully. In Jesus' death, we are challenged to a kind of courage that frightens us; the kind of courage that puts love of neighbor, both friend and foe alike, above our own desires, above our greed, above our prejudices, and above our fears.

In Jesus' legacy we are called to a new way of being in the world a way of being that sees the sacred in the ordinary stuff of life; a way of being that cherishes creation, that is open to the possibilities of evolving into an even more gracious and loving human being, a way of being that is nourished, grounded and sustained in this life by the One who is the source of life, who lives and moves in with and through us.

Today, we are given an amazing, enlightening vision of God. Standing over the crib, gazing at the baby. Hoping against hope that the child will tell us about God, because we have almost forgotten. Here in the vision handed down to us from generation to generation we can see exactly what God is like. God is like every mother's child, even a lowly, unwed mother's child; even a poor homeless mother's child. Our God looks like every mother's child. We need not forget about God, we need only to recognize the Spirit of God who lives in every child; every birth is sacred, every life is sacred, even yours, even mine, even the lives of those we have labeled as poor, homeless, despised, even the lives of those we call enemies are sacred.

Our challenge, staring into the crib, gazing at the baby is to remember the God in whom we live and move and have our being. To remember and to live fully, love extravagantly and become all that we are created to be and ever more shall be the with the Holy One, Emmanuel, God with us!

Thanks be to God. Amen!