

Christmas Day  
St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church  
The Rev. Marcia M. Lockwood  
December 25, 2016

*Gracious God, thank you for loving us enough to take on flesh and dwell among us. On this Christmas Day give us fresh eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to receive, and lips to proclaim you, in Christ's name. Amen.*

I saw bumper sticker the other day. It said, "Don't make me come down there." Signed, God. Not exactly sure what that means! Strange! The truth is, we are here this morning because God did exactly that! We're here this morning to celebrate God's greatest gift, loving us enough to become one of us, to show us his love, and our place in the great story.

And we come knowing that all of us are on a journey, our own road to Bethlehem, as we, too, make our way to the manger. The thing is, we bring different things with us every time we make this journey. Our hopes, our fears, our deepest longings, our desires. We hope and pray that all of these things will be met in the Christ child in the manger.

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Over 300 people gathered here last night for all three services. They came last night, as you come this morning, all seeking to make a connection between your story and the greatest story ever told. Some of you are here because it's your tradition to be here on Christmas Day. Others, perhaps, because the person sitting next to you wanted come, so you came, too. That's fine! Some are here this morning because you prefer the peace and quiet of Christmas Day. Whatever brought you here, we're glad you are here, because we're all seeking to connect our story, with the story we hear in the hymns, readings and prayers today.

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I read an interesting article recently that, one in five people, in our largest cities today are foreign born. The article went on to explain the different ways people around the world celebrate Christmas in their traditions. In Nigeria, for instance, people hunt antelope to make a traditional Nigerian stew; in the Philippines, people gather purple rice and coconut to make traditional Filipino Christmas cakes; people in Iceland look for a special kind of game bird. For me, growing up in the mid-west, it has always been roast beef! We all have different traditions but all are a piece of the greater story.

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I have a book at home. One of those wonderful coffee table books, which contains an amazing collection of creche sets from all over the world. Some are very small, some are grand, some

elaborate, some very simple. But the point is, I think these creche sets represent a way of telling the rich diversity of our own stories.

In the set from Nepal, the three wise men are depicted as a Buddhist monk, a Tibetan priest, and a Sherpa holy man. In the scene from Thailand, instead of the typical farm animals around the manger, there's a kneeling elephant, a water buffalo, pigs, sheep, goats, chickens, and a dog thrown in for good measure. One of my favorites is very small, a yellow bus overflowing with people. Sitting on the roof is the Holy Family. It's from Peru. The truth is, we all carry different stories as we make our way to the manger in Bethlehem. And each one is unique and part of the greater story.

One of the creche sets that really stands out has a most gripping story. When the collectors of these creche sets were in Pakistan many years ago, it was a dangerous time to be identified as a Christian. It often it meant persecution. While they were there, the embassy had given them a car and a driver to take them around. They learned that the driver was a Christian and they shared with him that they were collecting these individual creche sets. But, at the same time, they also were lamenting that they wouldn't be able to get one in Pakistan because it was too dangerous. Even, perhaps, at the risk of someone's life! Finally, the last day they were there, the driver came carrying a carefully wrapped package. It contained his own family's nativity set. It was truly a sacrificial gift. Frederick Buechner says, "To sacrifice something, is to make it holy, by giving it away in love." That is part of what this day is about - a sacrificial gift given to us for all time out of love.

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In 1943, the German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II. On Christmas Day, that year he joined some other Christians who were imprisoned with him and they sang hymns - a hopeful thing in the midst of great darkness. On that day he wrote a letter to his fiancée. It reads, "This Christmas we will show whether we can be content with what is truly essential. I used to be very fond of buying presents; but now that I have nothing to give, the gift that God gave us, the birth of Christ, seems all the more glorious."

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Our gift this day is the greatest gift we can imagine, a love that surpasses all our understanding the desire of God to be one of us, and live among us, full of grace and truth. On this day I pray that your hopes, your fears, your deepest longings and desires, will be met in the Christ child in the manger. May you know the peace of God that passes all understanding, and may the Christ child in the manger rekindle your heart and soul with God's grace and truth.

Merry Christmas. Amen.

