

Miraculously Ordinary

Fill us with joy and gratitude, open our hearts to your wisdom. Oh God, our great creator, Amen.

It's so good to see you all here to know you were willing to take a break from your busy lives to come and experience this most ordinary, yet extraordinary story of the night Christ was born.

My Granny Maggie was a big influence in my life. She was a devout Catholic and loved Christmas, in particular midnight mass. She was my grandmother on my mom's side and lived in Indiana, so I didn't get to see her as often as I wanted to, but when we did get together, we always had a great time. My grandparents lived across the street from their church, so it wasn't hard to get there when we visited for Christmas. She loved having the family together, as did my grandpa. He loved to cook. There was always a mix of my aunts and uncles, along with my cousins, each year we went to visit. One year, we were there a little early, so I got to have my granny all to myself on Christmas Eve, so, of course we went to midnight mass together. I remember asking her why she liked this service so much, and she told me, "It was because it was the night, we celebrated the birth of Christian hope into the world. When God broke open the world, and light poured in. It's the beginning of joy, peace and hope. A reminder that even the most ordinary beginnings can become extraordinary." Now, I'm not sure the ideas of hope and peace were nonexistent before Christ's birth, but as Christians, we certainly understood them in a different context after Jesus was born, his ministry, death, and resurrection. My granny also taught me much about justice and community engagement, a sermon for another time, for sure.

Our text for today is a familiar one for many. I wonder how we can hear this story with fresh ears and hearts. We find ourselves on a journey with Joseph and Mary to an unfamiliar place as they make their way to be registered in the city of David called Bethlehem. This is important in the gospel text as it establishes Jesus as being from the house of David.

While there, it came time for Mary to give birth. After Jesus was born, he was wrapped in cloth and laid in a manger. These all sound like very ordinary events to take place. Please get me right; I acknowledge that giving birth is anything but ordinary, especially at this time, yet I want to point out that the text mentions them as seemingly normal occurrences. No angels appearing at the birth etc. Even being counted in a census continues to be a regular part of our lives today. Then we hear about the shepherds just minding their own business working in the

fields, and suddenly an angel appears, telling them, “Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people”. As the angel shares the good news of their savior’s birth, accompanied by a multitude of heavenly host, the shepherds go and see for themselves this good news and then return glorifying and praising God.

Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. It is at this part of the text that we first see a glimpse of the extraordinary nature of this birth.

As I reread this text, I was reminded of my granny and a question she posed one year. She said I wondered what was in Mary’s heart that night. To know such deep love yet also concern about the world and life to which her son was being called?

It was through the ordinary that God chose to break open the world through the birth of Jesus. Through Jesus’ birth to a regular family, not one in power or of great wealth or riches. To reveal his birth to everyday shepherds tending their flocks at night. They weren’t of a royal lineage or connected to anyone specific; they were doing their jobs.

This sets a precedence for God’s love for all people and would set the stage for Jesus’ later message of God’s preference for the poor, outcasts, and oppressed.

This message of love, peace, and justice is as important today as it was when it began.

“I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you.”

In many ways, the manger can be like coming home for those who may have none. Creating a third place where all are equal in the eyes of God. A place where God is drawing people out of their ordinary lives to meet him at the birth of Jesus. God’s incarnation. God made flesh in the world.

How might this story be speaking to us anew this year?

What new wisdom might Mary’s turn toward reflection show us? Or how might we re-engage with awe and wonder this season?

My granny and I would go to many midnight masses together, and she would share much of her hard-earned wisdom with me.

I was blessed to be ordained on her birthday, and I know she would be proud of me for sharing the good news of Christ’s birth with all of you.

While the journey for Mary and Joseph was a difficult one. The birth of their son was about God coming to join us, to be one with us as closely as possible, bringing us peace, grace, love, hope, and joy.

I hope we can all remember the message of peace Jesus' birth brings to us.

To be kind to ourselves and our families, however you define them. And to extend that same loving kindness to all we meet on our journeys, sharing peace with all whom we meet today and always. **Amen**