

"Peace"
Christmas Eve 2016

During the season of Advent we have been challenged to:

- > WATCH for the coming of Christ- Through Active Waiting and Holy Living.
- > TURN from our sins and TURN to God.
- > SEE what God is doing in our midst.
- > DREAM God's dream for us.

So, here we are. It's Christmas Eve! Can you believe this Holy Night is here? We are here to celebrate the amazing birth of our Lord and Savior. We hear once again the prophecies foretelling the Coming Messiah. We marvel at the humble birth to peasant parents. We rejoice with the shepherds. We sing with the angels. We bow down and worship as the magi. What an amazing story that we re-live once again!

In a few moments we will sit at His Table to remember and give thanks for the Greatest Gift of all - not just the Birth of a Baby, but the Death, Burial and Resurrection of our Lord and Savior. And then we will hold our lighted candles as a reminder that Jesus is the Light, Who calls us to Be the Light and Shine our Light in the darkness of this world. What a beautiful way to remember who we are and Who called us to greater things!

But friends, in the midst of the beauty and holiness of these moments, we also are not blind or unaware of the world in which we live.

Rev. Dawn Chesser: *"We live in a turbulent time... (it's) a frightening period for people in the United States and (our) neighbors around the globe. No matter what political "side" (you're) on ..., the presidential election has now ended. The President-elect who will be inaugurated in a few weeks. There are satisfied winners and disappointed losers. There are global neighbors who are excited and (those) who are concerned.* (Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

Chesser: goes on: *"Likewise, the state of the United Methodist Church as a denomination is also in a precarious and fragile state as we struggle to find ... unity (in the midst of our) diversity. It is a wonderful time, and yet it is ... difficult ... to honor the differences... that exist within our worldwide denominational family."* (Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

Even as we gather with family, friends and loved ones during this holy time, there may be a variety of differences and opinions, along with unresolved conflict and misunderstandings. There may be hurt feelings that will re-surface when some come face to face. Certain topics may be avoided to maintain peace and harmony.

Even as we gather here tonight, there are some who are thrilled to be here, while others may have been dragged here. Some may be here to celebrate the birth of our Savior, while others may have questions and doubts. Whatever the reason, we are glad you are here. For we are all one in Christ. The Apostle Paul reminds us, "there is no Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free" (I would add), "there is no Republican or Democrat, conservative, moderate, or progressive, United Methodist or Lutheran, Catholic or Presbyterian, church member or non-member, attender or visitor..." "(We) are ALL ONE in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

And in the midst of our differences and tension, our Savior is born.

Most likely, it was not a Silent Night when Christ was born. Living in a world of violence, injustice and power struggles, the pregnant teenager and her fiancé, who travelled far to sign up with the IRS, forgot to book a room. Imagine the heartache of “no vacancy” signs all around. Delivering her firstborn in a barn out back, among the sights, sounds and smells of livestock, surely was not what she imagined. And before long, a quiet night was not the plan, as visiting shepherds appeared, celebrating the good news with all.

But friends, in the midst of the chaos, there is good news. Christ, the Savior, is born! He is the Messiah, the Lord, the Prince of Peace. And He came for ALL people.

But maybe this is a hard time of year for you for any number of reasons.

Mark Shultz' song, “*Different Kind of Christmas*” was written as a tribute to his wife's late father. He acknowledges that Christmas will be a little different for some.

For some, this Christmas will be ... Different.

Maybe you have lost a loved one. Maybe you have gained a family member or two or three.

Maybe you began to care for a family member.

Maybe you find yourself single again. Maybe you got married.

Maybe you started school. Maybe you graduated.

Maybe you lost a job. Maybe you started a new job. Or added another job.

Maybe you relocated. Maybe you bought or sold a home.

Maybe you will be alone this Christmas.

Maybe you will feel alone, even while you are in a crowd.

The world in which we live is a very dark place. Whatever your lot in life, Christ was born for you. He is the LIGHT who brings HOPE, HEALING, JOY, LOVE, PEACE.