

...and so we pray:

O God, Immanuel,
we come today, tonight, and always, to give you thanks and praise. The gifts you give us are beyond measure. How can we ever express our deepest gratitude and love for your Holy Gift tonight? We are humbled at your manger. Indeed, angels sing.

While we're here tonight in this small family-love, we pray for those who are still out in the cold. May the light of Bethlehem's greatest Child, touch every dark place. For those who, because of persistent hatreds and terrorism or war, and those who are far from the promise of peace and good-will;

come, Immanuel, and help your servants complete the works of love and peace you have begun.

We pray for those, who, this night, live derelict buildings, who sleep in back alleys, or in a homeless shelter.

Come, Immanuel, and help all your lost and homeless children find their true inheritance.

For those who are ill, or in the hospital, or at home. For those facing treatment or surgery, or who are recovering. Those in ICU...facing Christmas without their loved ones.

Come, Immanuel and bring strength and hope to the nurses and doctors who do your healing work this night.

For those who are facing Christmas without loved-ones because of loss, separation, or because of these Covid times.

Come, Immanuel, and give to the grieving comfort and deep peace.

Come, Immanuel, and give all your people the assurance of your constant presence, and your all-sufficient grace.

And we pray for ourselves, on this Holy Christmas night.

Spirit of Christ, you are the Very Word of God—who came to us in a straw-filled manger, grant each of us the will and the wisdom to live as you would have us live.

Tender God, you touch us with the soft cooing, the sometimes loud crying, of a new baby and the sense of awe of new life. Our lives are transformed because of the gift of Jesus Christ. Each year we celebrate his birth and know the timeless impact of his life and ministry.

We pray all these things, in the holy goodness of a tiny baby who brings Light to the World.

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy names, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Meditation Christmas Eve Dec 24, 2020

Even if things didn't go as planned, new life always breaks forth. Jesus, God's work, arrived in the midst of political events and no vacancies. The important message of Christmas is that even when things don't go as planned, God arrives.

God is present in our smaller-than-usual traditions this year. Some of us had to put our tree by ourselves, some of us are trying to cook smaller meals than we're used to. For some, the house is just "too quiet," Everyone all over the world has been saying, "We're sorry, but this Christmas won't be the same." But, what exactly does that mean?

Yes, it's going to be different, we understand that, but we don't have to like it!

We forget the scary nature of the first Christmas - we need to remind ourselves that it's not about the Christmas card images....There wasn't any smiling cherubs with feathery wings hovering over a nice tidy stall with fresh hay, the soft glow of star-light...and Mary looking like she'd just had her make-up done. There isn't one bit of manure anywhere.

Have a look through your cards, or magazines, or store fliers, or catalogues, (if you can find a nativity scene, they're getting rare), and see if the nativity looks real on paper...but maybe that's it; you had to be there.

The first Christmas was all about the unexpected, in places unexpected. Christ arrived in a cattle stall, and Mary laid him in a wooden box of hay (the manger), the cows eat from. If the Son of God can arrive in such circumstances, so can truth. So can joy.

The gospel reminds us God appeared to the less than perfect (shepherds), and the less than powerful (shepherds). Too often we think God won't talk to us if we don't go to church enough (or at all.) Or because we feel sheepish or guilty about our actions, or lack of them. Because we somehow think our lives are less than holy...(who says).

But if God can appear to shepherds, he can surely appear to anyone, even us. And God's a good listener.

God appeared to a couple who were going about their business, going back to Joseph's hometown to be counted in the census. Maybe they planned on going right back to Nazareth. I'm not sure it was a good idea to travel, on a donkey, so close to Mary's due date. I wonder if she had the opportunity to

stay home with the female members of her family? It would seem like the logical thing to do. After all, only men were counted in the census.

But God had other plans.

The shepherds were also going about their daily, nightly work. And suddenly “...an angel stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them..”

What? This isn't what we prayed for! I don't even think we were praying!

We tend to look for God in the beautiful, the amazing, the unbelievable.

We need to remember God is looking for us too, but not in the beautiful or the amazing. We need to remember we are looking for each other.

But God's message interrupts us, immediately, right on the spot, no matter where we are, or what we're doing. God whispers, “Do not be afraid...I am bringing you good news of great joy.” This is the same message Jesus tells all of his followers, “Don't be afraid.”

And God doesn't want huge festivals, big parties, lots of food and decorations everywhere. That's good, because Christmas will be different this year...God just wishes us peace.

And that cattle stall? Be careful, you might step in the manure.