

Isaiah 52:7-10
Hebrews 1:1-4
John 1:1-14
Psalm 98

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The Gift of Hope That Endures

It has been a tough year for many of us. Our nation and the entire world is in conflict while polarizing political drama, discord and divide continues to take center stage. Many of us are weary of the barrage of bad news that seems to never let up because of our access to around the clock cable news networks. This can easily cloud and distort our view of the world, often resulting in a feeling that we may be losing our footing in institutions and ideals that once felt stable and dependable. It is easy to lose sight of the many good and worthwhile things people are doing to make a positive difference in people's lives. We are a people in desperate need of hope – a hope that endures; a hope that sustains us in the belief that life can and will be better. A life where we find purpose and meaning.

As Christians, we put all our hope and dreams in the unfathomable mystery of God's Incarnation that is made know to us on Christmas Day. We find this hope in the most unlikely of places, in the nativity story about the tiny babe born in Bethlehem so many generations ago.

John's prologue introduces us to Christ with some of the most beautiful and majestic language in our holy scripture. These wondrous and multi-faceted images of the Christ engage and challenge both our heart and our mind. We meet Christ as the Word at the beginning of all creation, that exists now and through all eternity. This is the Christ that is the Light and Life of the entire world. And, finally we meet Christ as a human being, one made of flesh and blood; one who walks on this earth and dwells amongst us. Through John's gospel we encounter the mystery of the Holy One who is both imminently within us and at the same time, beyond us, cradling the entire universe.

These words have the power to feed our souls. They draw us inward, filling the deepest recesses of our beings with wonder; prompting us to ponder:

Have I lost sight of God?

Does my life matter to God?

What would it mean to have God in the center of my life?

At the same time, the poetic rhythm of these esoteric images of light and dark, lift us beyond ourselves, inviting us to transcend to a place where linear time and eternity intersect. It is through this mysterious nexus of time and eternity that we encounter the Holy, the Word, God Incarnate – Jesus the Christ, full of beauty and grace. Paradoxically, this holy mystery dwells deep within each one of us. It enables us to claim our true identity as a beloved child of God.

Throughout the quiet darkness of the Advent season, we waited with hope for a savior that would overcome the darkness, lifting us up out of the brokenness of our lives and restoring us to a place of light and wholeness. However, it seems God catches us unaware and we are never quite prepared for what we receive – God breaking into the world, into history, into our lives in a most humble, quiet and unassuming way. We could never anticipate that something of such incomprehensible and colossal magnitude would take place in the form a tiny, howling infant, born in a dirty, smelly stable in some backwater town, whose poor parents had no money, position or title. In the world's eyes a real nobody. Not exactly what the ancient Israelites had in mind as they waited patiently for generations for the arrival of the One they would call the Messiah, the Savior of the World.

But this is how God seems to work in the world. The Holy One is made manifest in the very midst of our very ordinary, messy and often mundane lives. This babe from Bethlehem is the full expression of divine love that dwells deep within each one of us.

This is the gift of this Christmas season; hope that endures all. Hope in the redeeming power of Christ's love that brings forth opportunities for a renewed life, full of promise. Hope is the light of Christ that fills the inner sanctuary of our souls, overcoming the life-denying darkness of despair and injustice, making what seemed impossible now seems possible. And, hope in the power of love that defies and overcomes all. This is the source of our hope that endures; the Christ child that comes into our world, into our lives and into our hearts, bearing God's extravagant and audacious love that never ends.

God is with us. Emmanuel.

Merry Christmas – may your heart be filled with God's love and hope.

Amen.