

Sermon 11-28-21
Paul Purdue preaching

Luke tells us that on Christmas Eve shepherds were in the fields around Jerusalem keeping watch over their flocks "when suddenly the glory of the Lord shone all around them." That image "the glory of the Lord shining all around them" has gripped me since I was a child. I used to experiment with lighting, unscrewing Christmas lights and seeing the effect of transparent or painted bulbs, and then the effect of clear, white, yellow, orange colards. Mom banned all twinkling, flashing, red and blue bulbs from our piano-top stable. Scholars tell us that "glory of the Lord" is the same kind of light that shone around Moses coming down off the mountain, the three prophets on the Mount of Transfiguration, and Jesus on Easter. Amid that glorious light, Heaven spoke, "This will be a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." That image of God lying in a cattle stall may be my favorite Christmas symbol. Signs, symbols, images, and icons point us toward spiritual truths that escape our best theological formulas.

Ponder the signs of Jesus' arrival...

There was no room at the inn.

The star returned. The Magi rejoiced with overwhelmingly great joy.

Zachariah fell silent.

Twice the angel spoke in dreams, "Do not be afraid, Joseph."

An angel and Elizabeth greet Mary: "Hail Mary! Full of Grace! The Lord is with You! Blessed are you!"

Mary answered, "Behold, here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be."

Mary sang, "God fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty!"

The glory of the Lord shone around them.

The Orthodox or eastern churches revere the power of images and icons as means of God's grace and conduits of spiritual truth. We western Christians love to explain unexplainable holy mysteries. The hymn Angels from the Realms invites us to exchange debate for wonder "Sages leave your contemplations, brighter visions beam afar... Come and worship. Come and worship"

Do we ever stop consuming, contemplating, debating, dividing, or dismantling? When do we abide with God, rest our souls, recover our breath, and wonder? When I first began doodling my own artist vision of Luke 2, I wondered why so many images portray Jesus alone? Why does no one comfort God, come to us as vulnerable as a newborn child? Art, wonder, holy daydreaming opens us to fresh inspiration.

Advent invites us to slow down and practice wonder. Advent creates space in our hearts and lives for the arrival of Jesus Christ. I invite you to slow down and respond to each week's scripture by making your own art exploring the question "What is God inspiring in me through this worship, meditation, or Scripture?" Time spent prayerfully abstracting, baking, crafting, cooking, coloring, daydreaming, dancing, doodling, journaling, painting, photographing, rhyming, rapping, sculpting, storytelling, or silently meditating makes space for God's transforming Spirit. Wonder shifts our thinking. When will you practice wonder? **When will you ask God to inspire you- to write hope into your heart ? Let us create space for art -not for an art project, entering a competition, or mastering some theology- but simply opening ourselves to being inspired by the Holy! Will you play with the Nativity lighting, rehearse Mary's Magnificent, add your verse to a carol, snap a photo of the glory, or just stare up at the stars in wonder? **Will we slow down enough to see the glory of the Lord shining all around us?****