



FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN. UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

December 2 marks the beginning of Advent: a time of waiting and preparation, anticipation and hope in a world that seems very chaotic, especially if you turn on the news. Journalists have abided by the motto, "if it bleeds, it leads" so begin the news story with gory stuff. The sensational sells. We Christians also have a sensational message: God became a human being! Such a pronouncement was considered blasphemy to Jewish and Muslim believers. God is greater than any human they proclaim. But we Christians know that "nothing is impossible with God." (Luke 1.37)

Our Jewish ancestors waited for the coming messiah, the one anointed by God, to lead the small nation from Roman captivity. They hoped to have another king as great as David. They hoped for a child born to be called Wonderful Counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father and Prince of Peace who would reign on David's throne to establish justice and righteousness forever." (Isaiah 9:6+ paraphrased.) No one was expecting the messiah to be born in a barn to a homeless couple. But then no one expected the youngest son of Jesse to be anointed by Samuel as king. God continues to surprise us in unexpected ways. The good news is that God's surprises are more than we wish for. God's blessings are what we need not what we hope for.

The early Christians did not celebrate Christmas. Holy week and Easter were the great festivals followed by the day of Epiphany. It wasn't until sometime in the 300's that Christmas began to emerge as a feast day. The earliest Christmas hymn I am familiar with is "Of the Father's Love Begotten." It reflects the first chapter of John and the familiar Christmas story of Luke. "In the beginning was the Word..." "He is alpha and omega." "The babe, the world's redeemer." "The Word became flesh and lived among us."

This year we will prepare for the coming savior with the four Sundays of Advent, followed by Christmas Eve worship and a service of Lessons and Carols. This is also a year when Epiphany occurs on a Sunday, so we will have an Epiphany service! We will have many opportunities to reflect on who we are, whose we are, and the sensational, unexpected gift of hope—a baby born to fulfill what Isaiah predicted. Jesus is our wonderful counselor, God in the flesh, the one who established and continues to establish God's justice in a world lacking in mercy. God, Emmanuel, is with us today and every day.

Come and prepare for an amazing birth and worship the new born king!

May God the Creator who delights in you,
Jesus the Savior who is born for you
And the lifegiving Spirit who shines on you
Bless you and keep you in hope and peace.

Shalom, *Pastor Best*