

Christmas Eve Meditation
There Really Is a Reason to Celebrate
The Rev. Tom Hagood
Dec. 24, 2009

I almost felt like cancelling Christmas this year. We had a tragic loss in the church this week ... young 15-month old Brendon Hope died. We had all celebrated with him at his baptism just last August. And as I sat there yesterday with his grieving parents ... we all wondered how could this happen?

And I also wondered ... how does anyone celebrate Christmas in the midst of such a terrible tragedy? What could there possibly be to celebrate? This is supposed to be the season of joy ... of peace ... of hope ... of love.

I realize that bad things do happen to good people ... but why now ... why during this season? Why can't there just be a universal truce during this time of year ... say between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day ... when nothing bad is allowed to happen ... not a single tragic event would be allowed to happen to anyone ... no loved ones die ... none of those DUI induced holiday car crashes ... wars would all be put on hold ... terrorist would take a break from reeking terror ... people with illnesses would all get better and celebrate with their families ... husbands and wives who might have been on the verge of divorce would find a loving way to stay together ... criminals would find honest work during the season ... the homeless would be given a place to live ... food would be shared with all who were hungry ... every person without a job would find work ... addicts wouldn't need their bottle ... or their pills ... or their injections during this time ... wouldn't all that be wonderful ... if we had such a Christmas truce every year ... and all the horrible things that happen in our lives would just disappear for a few weeks every year ... then we'd really be ready to celebrate Christmas ... as a miracle of miracles. But that's not what happens, is it?

All the stuff that scares us ... all the anxiety and the pressures of this world ... all the horrible things that can possibly happen ... still happen during this season just as they do throughout the rest of the year. And while many of you get through the year without anything too terrible happening ... many of you don't ... and this season ... Christmas ... can become a heavy burden.

And yet ... no matter what may have happened in our lives during this past year ... we still come together ... year after year ... even in the face of the ugly stuff this world might throw at us ... and we still celebrate the birth of the Christ child.

What is it that keeps bringing us back here ... year after year? Why do you make this annual trek to the church? Maybe you are one of those who just like to sing those wonderful uplifting carols every year. They make you feel good inside.

Maybe you like the tradition of doing something that's just been done for so many years ... you used to gather with your parents on Christmas Eve in church ... and now you gather your family together on the eve of the birth. Maybe holding candles in a darkened room with a lot of other people singing Silent Night seems like a neat thing to do.

I suppose all of those things are good reasons ... but I suspect each of you is really here for something far greater ... something that literally holds your life together ... something that makes this season a time when hope really does overtake hopelessness ... when there is the quiet sound of peace hanging in the air ... when the joy on faces seems more real than contrived ... and when love is actually shared one person to another. But how can that be?

How can the birth of a little baby some 2000 years ago still be a cause for hope ... peace ... joy and love? And even more so ... why would God want to do it in the first place? Why would God want to come to us ... incarnate ... as a human being ... and put up with everything that we have to put up with? Why would God Almighty ... need to do anything like that?

Why didn't God just stay up there in heaven ... you know, rocking in his chair, stroking his long white beard ... and maybe once in a while answering a prayer or two. Isn't that how it used to be? No ... of course not.

Because something very special happened on that morning when Mary gave birth to Jesus ... and God became incarnate ... God became human ... just like you and me. But why? Why would God do that? Maybe this will help us understand.

Way back on June 5, 1978, a seven-year old boy named Martin Turgeon slipped off a wharf and fell into the Prairie River in Canada. At least a dozen adults saw him struggle for a few moments before he sank and drowned. But no one was willing to help him.

Why didn't anyone dive in to save him? Well ... it seems that just upstream, a plant used to dump raw sewage right into the river. The Prairie River water was dirty—dangerous ... toxic to your health. So, nobody was willing to jump in to save Martin Turgeon. (*Redeeming the Past: Recovering from the Memories That Cause Our Pain*, By David A. Seamands.)

In essence ... that is precisely what God did when he was born to Mary. He jumped right in ... feet first ... right into the dirty and toxic waters of this world ... and he was willing to do it because we cannot do what God can only do for us. He jumped in completely ... and in doing so experienced every single raw emotion ... every pain ... joy and tears ... suffering ... anxiety ... he tasted the pleasure of good friendships ... of loving families ... he also grieved the loss of close friends ... and then even suffered the ultimate horror of dying on a cross for us.

Why ... why would God choose to come into this world and experience life as we know it ... why would God want to do that for us? Why would God want to become incarnate ... human ... and have to endure life ... and then finally death?

It's really quite simple ... because God so loved the world ... that he gave his only begotten Son ... that whosoever believeth in Him, shall not perish ... but have everlasting life.

And that ... in a nutshell is why the little baby ... Jesus Christ ... was born into this world. There was no hope before Christ entered this world ... now there is more than hope ... for in God's gift to us on that morn so long ago ... we have all the hope we will ever need to face

whatever we will face in our journey through this world ... for in Christ, we do not walk that journey alone ... when there is pain and suffering ... we are surrounded with compassion ... when there is grieving and tears ... we are carried in the arms of the shepherd ... and when someday we face death itself ... we will not stand in fear ... for there Christ has already gone ... and death stands as an empty symbol against the power of the resurrection ... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Yes ... on this Christmas Eve ... we are all sad over the death of little Brendon. It is a horrible tragedy. Yet in the birth of our Savior ... we can rest in the promise that his death has been overcome ... and he is in the loving arms of our Savior, Jesus Christ ... just as the love and compassion of Christ ... flowing through all of our prayers ... are surrounding Terri and John, sustaining them even in their pain and suffering.

Yes, we do come together on this evening to celebrate ... to celebrate even when we might not feel like celebrating. For on this night ... long ago ... the Kingdom of God became a part of this world ... and heaven kissed the earth ... and love came down at Christmas.

In his book *Miracles*, C.S. Lewis offers a beautiful analogy for the Incarnation. He writes: Think of a pearl diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing up in midair, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into the black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to color and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing that he went down to recover. He and (the pearl) ... have come up into the light. (*Miracles*, chap. 14)

That is the miracle of this eve ... For we, too, have a Savior.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.