

Twelve Days of Christmas

Christmas... Never has a word been spoken that can mean so many things to so many people. I mean we have words like aloha and shalom that carry a variety of meanings, but the words themselves are fairly neutral. But Christmas, Christmas is a word that has the power to draw forth hope, love, and excitement, or despair, anger, and depression.

For most of the world Christmas was over on December 25th, but for many Christians, Christmas continues where the Christmas season found or still finds you on the emotional or spiritual scale, whether Christmastide is a time of joy or a time of sadness, we are all the family of God. We are all the same in God's eyes and we all live with the same desire to enter into the wonder of this Holy season.

In these twelve days of Christmas between Advent and Epiphany we celebrate the astounding event that God in Christ came to dwell with us. We marvel once again at the depth of God's love for all of God's people and rejoice that God will come to us again.

But, sometimes amid the joy there are moments when we smile and say, "Merry Christmas" even as we ache inside and wonder, if in the end, the birth of this miraculous baby has anything to do with us at all. And the good news my friends is that the answer is yes, yes, yes, a *thousand times yes!* This is *precisely* the miracle of Emmanuel, the miracle of our God who has chosen to be *with* us. God chose to bring us God's love in the flesh. The infinite, unknowable Creator of all things chooses out of infinite, boundless love to be born to us and for us. So often we can get lost in despair because we feel we must somehow be perfect or have perfect lives in order to be worthy of God's love. We think we must ascend to a state of some undefiled holiness in order to rise to God's presence.

But in this Christmas season, in this child, our God says, my people, my children, it is I who will come to you. I come to you in the midst of family stress and I especially will come to you in your grief, your pain, and your imperfections. Emmanuel, God with us, means God with us everywhere, in any condition we may find ourselves in. In our happiness or sorrow, in glory or disgrace, God *never* abandons us. From his birth to his death God in Christ laughed, cried, suffered, grieved, as well as became confused and dismayed by those he loves---just like us. There is no situation in our lives no matter how secret or hidden, how embarrassing, or shameful that our God who comes to us in the flesh cannot heal and make whole. The world paid little attention to the birth of this child in the manger, but soon enough the world learns that God has done a startling, new thing.

"Be not afraid" God's messengers tell us, for you have been given freedom---freedom from fear, freedom from death, and freedom from all the ways the world might tell you that you are not good enough to receive God's love. This baby who was born in deep obscurity *is* the King of Glory and our great high priest.

I believe the Good News to remember is this: No matter what Christmas calls out in us, no matter what the word has come to mean, what is worth hanging our hat on is this: God in Christ comes to us.

God comes to us not just at Christmas, but again and again in the midst of our joys, heartbreaks, confusions and, most tenderly, in the memories of those we miss at certain times of the year. All we need do to receive him is bid him welcome and make a place for him in the depths of our hearts.

Wishing you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year...Stephanie+