

# God Is With Us!

Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Eve, December 24, In the Year of Our LORD, 2005

Gates Presbyterian Church

The Rev. Ralph S. English, Pastor

For months, music has blared on the radio and in the malls. Bright lights have flashed and glimmered. Parties, sometimes raucous if not spirits-filled, started right after Thanksgiving. Gold and silver, red and green, and every other hue under the rainbow has characterized a time of celebration. Gifts are wrapped in a myriad of color, ribbons and bows.

The loud music, bright lights, food-filled parties, extravaganza of colors and bountiful gifts are pretty good themes and motifs ... if one were to celebrate the birth of human royalty and the splendor that so often accompanies majesty. Those celebrations of Christmas (even though it was actually Advent) befit the birth of one born to sit on and rule from a throne, make decrees from on high, distance oneself from the common folk, hide behind castle if not palace walls, and live in the midst of music, lights, color and perhaps day and night long parties.

Two thousand years ago, most people looked for the birth of their Messiah with all the trappings of that definition of royalty. To most Jews, the "throne of David" meant splendor, power, majesty, pomp, circumstance, political independence from foreign rulers, and the decadence for which King Herod's court was known. The people of Herod's day looked for the Messiah to come wrapped in splendor, wrapped, if you will, with the gold, silver, glitter and extravagance we witness in our day and age in what so often passes for Christmas.

So instead, this Messiah, this Christ, this Jesus, came wrapped in swaddling clothes, in the most ordinary of brown-paper-bag like wrappings: brown hay. This LORD of Lords arrived in the most unlikely and far-from-palace-glitter and genteel-manner possible, in as earthy a place as they come: a cattle shed where the odors of incense and perfume were not the prevailing odors!

We don't sit here this evening because we believe God is in some far-off, palace-like heaven distanced from our human lives and lot. We are here this evening because Christ left the majesty of heaven to come and be *with* us, among us, in the bare, straw-strewn, ordinary, most likely sullied, and on occasion strife and tempest-torn times of our lives. God is *with* us. We don't worship a God characterized by the glitter of what passes for Christmas "out there" that pretends all is or could be well with the world were one to receive all the gifts one wanted. We give praise to the God Whose arrival comes in such an ordinary way that it is extraordinary, that God is with us in a world torn by hungers, thirsts, despair if not depression, inadequate housing or employment, war, displaced persons .... Indeed, persons left homeless by the tsunami or hurricanes like Katrina might have a better sense of Mary and Joseph's plight than anyone sitting in a nice, warm, love-filled Sanctuary.

God is *with* us! We know that in the innermost reaches of our souls. God's message of grace and love is rendered in reading the Gospel, singing the hymns, listening to anthems. Christ's gift is reflected in the gentle glow of single candles that represent the Light of the World mirrored in individual souls and collectively the church. In the gentle light of candles God reminds us that Christ's light will overcome whatever darkness the world metes out.

God is *with* us! Amen.