

“What Do We See?”

Luke 2:1-14

Christopher Henry is a pastor at Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis . . .

and a couple of years ago, while he was visiting at the hospital, he stumbled upon one of God’s children –

a nineteen-year-old unmarried girl who, five months earlier, had prematurely given birth to twins . . .

and throughout those five months, the twins had not yet left the hospital.

In those days, every morning she was there . . . holding . . . praying . . . waiting . . .

and in those days, every night she was there . . . holding . . . praying . . . waiting.

Eventually Christopher Henry summoned the courage to ask her, “What gives you strength?”

And with a look that showed wisdom beyond her nineteen years,

the young woman simply responded, “I see a new world coming.”¹

She saw a new world coming.

What do we see?

In the midst of faded hopes

or diminished dreams

or countless covid cases,

what do we see?

Do we *see* this new world coming? . . .

because, at Christmas, we are summoned to turn our eyes to the new world that is born in a way that would have been almost unnoticed by humankind,

a new world inaugurated by a King born not in a royal nursery but in a barn,

a new world fashioned by a Child not robed in splendor but in bands of cloth.

At Christmas we see a Child born in the world’s darkness . . .

a Child for whom there was no place . . .

a Child whose birth was announced

not by the crowds in the streets,

not by doctors in a maternity ward,

not by the hovering paparazzi,

but by the humble creatures of the earth

and a sky filled with angelic messengers singing of glory and peace.

We see a Child who invites us to embrace Him,

so that we may learn to embrace our sisters and brothers

when grief spills from the corner of an eye

¹ adapted from Christopher A. Henry, “A Poetic Prophet,” *Journal for Preachers (Volume XXXIII, Number 1)*, Advent 2009: page 29.

and moistens the earth with its wetness.

We see a Child who is born at a time
when there were no vacancies,
when there was no room,
when life was too busy to accommodate Him.

We see a Child who shines a light for the people who walk in darkness . . .
we see a Child who inaugurates peace on earth in the midst of the violence of the world . . .
and we see a Child who changes human history because this Child beckons us to see all
humankind through the eyes of God's love.

After all, the angel conveys this message to the shepherds,
"See, I am bringing you good news of great joy for *all* the people,
for, through this Messiah, a true sense of peace on earth can be experienced."

At Christmas, we can see the Child whom we embrace
removing from us the impenetrable armor with which we have barricaded ourselves, our beliefs,
our culture,
as this Child forbids us to march mindlessly to the lifeless drumbeat of battle,
and instead melts the personal artillery of our destructive words and our vengeful actions
which we use to assault one another,
so that, at Christmas, we can look forward to that day when the Christ Child's
whisper of life is exponentially louder than all the explosions of death,
and people will never again learn war anymore.

We see the Child initiating peace on earth,
so that all the literal and metaphorical land mines of human experience will be eradicated,
and hands will not be raised in conflict but joined in unity,
and the Prince of peace will bury in a garbage pile the rust-eaten weaponry produced by
the horribly misnamed "art of war"
and then recycle all that death-dealing material into a colorful landscape of hope.

At Christmas, we see the searching eyes of the Christ Child
seeking whoever is lost, whoever is forgotten, or whoever is in peril or pain,
and listening for the sound of our tears so that the Wonderful Counselor can come and
comfort us.

And because we have encountered the Holy Child of Bethlehem whose parents found no room in the
inn,

we can now see opportunities for us to serve our sisters and brothers
who may be homeless and looking for shelter
or hungry and pawing through rubbish,
or refugees and immigrants who find themselves a long way from home and looking
for a neighbor as they struggle for survival.

At Christmas, we see the Child, an architect of light,
transforming the world's darkness with a life-changing blueprint of illumination,
spilling galaxies of enlightenment upon the murky alleyways of prejudice and narrow-
mindedness,
and redesigning the dark and desolate deserts of injustice with the radiant glory that
beams from the highest heaven
in order to build the foundation of equality.
And because we have encountered the Holy Child of Bethlehem who reveals the Light of the world,
we can now see where we can reflect God's light
by revealing God's truth that the world attempts to conceal,
and by painting a rainbow of renewal across the skies that inspires us to value creation
in a way that honors the One to whom all heaven and *nature* sing.

At Christmas, we see a Child extending His arms to all humankind,
tracing with His finger the images of love that God has imprinted on every face,
and calling us to remember us how this Child,
for whom there was no room in the inn,
makes room at His table for everyone who may be forgotten, ignored, or unloved.
Do we see that message of Christmas?

On Christmas Eve in 1967, William Weaver, 18-years-old at the time,
was walking in the neighborhood where he grew up in Mechanicsville, Tenn.,
when he saw a boy gliding down the street on a bicycle.
“Boy, that looks like my brother's bike,” he mused.
When he got home, he asked his younger brother Wayne where that bicycle was.
“It's down on the steps,” he answered.
But it wasn't.

The Weaver brothers tracked down where the other boy lived —
an unlit shack in an alley —
and they intended to confront him and beat that boy.
But their father was there, and he said, “Just be quiet, and let me talk.”

When they arrived at the house,
an elderly man with a cane answered their knock on the door.
The shack was cold and dark,
and he had a single candle for light . . .
and the old man's grandson was the boy who had stolen the bike.
When the old man turned to the boy (who was about 10-years-old),
his grandson started crying, and he said, “I just wanted something for Christmas.”
William Weaver and his family then took the bike and walked home.
But when they reached their home, William's father told his mother what had happened.

And during the story, his mother remained silent;
she was totally quiet;
and then without saying a word, she began to cut the turkey in half and all the fixings,
and she started packing it up.
William's father went to the coal yard and got a big bag of coal.
And then he said to his younger son, "You've got another bike, don't you?"
The boy said, "Yeah."
And then, the three returned to the shack in the alley,
this time with some food,
and this time with some coal to provide heat,
and this time with the bike to be given as a gift.
When the little boy in the shack saw them at the door, he began to cry . . .
and William's father (who worked as a chauffeur and whose mother worked as a domestic)
didn't have a lot of resources . . .
but he reached into his wallet and gave the old man \$20, which was a huge deal back then
in 1967, and said, "Merry Christmas."
The old man said, "Thank you," and broke down in tears.
"That Christmas," William Weaver says,
"I don't even remember what gift I got,
but I do know that made me feel better than any Christmas I have ever had."²

On that Christmas, a new world had been born.
The table of grace had been enlarged . . .
the warmth of love and compassion was shared . . .
fractured relationships were reconciled . . .
so that more than 50 years later, the vision, the image, still remains distinctly vivid.
And today, more than 2000 years later, a Child still inspires us to embrace all humankind . . .
a Child still leads us to promote the common welfare of all people . . .
and a Baby in a manger still empowers us
to share the grace that demonstrates that everyone is treasured,
and to offer an embrace to those who feel lost or forgotten,
and to extend a hand in service to share Christ's love with all people,
and in our own way, to participate in that new world coming.

And so, tonight, what do we see? . . .
because on this night, and in this place, our eyes are opened
to *see* the fellowship of brothers and sisters who join us in Christian love . . .

² <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/15/570806606/on-christmas-eve-a-stolen-bicycle-and-a-lesson-in-giving>

to *see* the vision of the new world coming that God inaugurated through the birth of the Holy Child . . .

and to *see* how God is now calling us to live our lives in a way that makes a difference in the world and glorifies the Child whose birth we celebrate.

So really the question is not, “What do we see?”

The question is, “From this day forward,

when we walk out that door,

will other people see Christ in us?”

Because of Christmas, will other people see Christ in us?

This sermon delivered by Tom Ulrich
at the Joint Worship Service
of Westminster Presbyterian Church
and New Covenant Community Church,
Akron, Ohio,
on December 24, 2021.