

“Jesus: God’s Message of Love to the World” by Pastor Susan Garofalo
John 3:16-17, et al

For the past four weeks, we have witnessed the Advent themes of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love, through Messengers and their messages: Prophets and angels, the former, gifted with a sensitivity and an awareness to the Divine, and the latter, the Divine themselves; all of whom brought the Word and the Will of God to the faithful, generation after generation. As each week passed, the story of Advent, the anticipation of Jesus’ birth came more and more alive. We began with words from the Angel Gabriel, through the prophet Daniel, who promised the rising of a King. It was the Angel Gabriel who then visited Zechariah, to announce that his wife, Elizabeth would bear a son named John, the one who would dedicate his entire life to the One they would call Immanuel. Then the Angel Gabriel would visit Mary, a virgin, to announce that she would bear this Immanuel, the Holy Son of the Most High. To this very moment, the immediacy of her obedience; the purity of her joy remain very close to my heart. And then-interestingly, an unnamed angel visited Joseph, inviting him to do what was contrary to everything he knew to be true: to stay with Mary, though she was with child-and raise that child as his own.

Where would we be without these messengers, and their stories? Their very presence throughout our Advent Season gives us a wider lens through which we can bear witness, to the uniqueness, the Holiness-the Love, from which the story of the birth of Jesus originates. We learn that the story of Jesus cannot only focus on the birth of an infant Son, born to young, impoverished parents, in a stable, because there was no room for this occasion to take place elsewhere. We must consider the Messengers and their message every time we think about the birth of Jesus, because the infant born to those impoverished parents, in the humblest of surroundings, was none other, and I do mean-none other than God Incarnate, the Prince of Peace himself. We can’t focus on his cherubic face, and not consider the moment of his Baptism, by none other than John the Baptist. We cannot reach for his tiny hand, and not marvel at his knowledge of the Creator God, the richness of his teaching, his ability to heal and to perform miracles. We cannot gaze into his endless eyes without contemplating the sacrifice he made, to bring us back into Unity with God. If it weren’t for the Prophets and the Angels: if it weren’t for prophecy, messages of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love: calls to every believer in every age, if it weren’t for the celestial celebration witnessed only by the shepherds that night, or the star that drew the wise men to the King born that night...would we ever know that the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords had finally come to us?

Their presence, their words, their stories collectively remind us as they have reminded every believer in every generation: the height, depth, breadth, and the power of God's Love. Their presence reminds us that the miracle of Jesus' birth-the sheer miracle of his coming to us, can only be described as Holy, because to be in his presence, is to be in the presence of God. That means that the place where it all happened, that humble, lowly stable-amid the animals with their sounds and their smells, was Holy Ground, and all of those present, were blessed by the presence of God every bit as much as those who stood at the base of Mt. Sinai, when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. In that ancient time, God cloaked Godself with smoke and with fire. No human eye could look upon the face of God and live. And yet, so many generations later, Mary and Joseph could hold God Incarnate: a tiny, seemingly helpless infant in the crook of their respective arms. They could touch his face, reach for his tiny hand, gaze lovingly into his eyes, and not suffer the same fate. In fact, the response was quite the opposite.

There was only love in that stable that night; Holy love, absolutely, Powerful Love, to be sure; Eternal Love, without question. The kind of Love that the world had never witnessed before, or since. It was a Love that changed the world forever.

God's love belongs to every believer in every age..every age. There is an old saying, that I use on occasion: that, "not every gift can be wrapped", meaning with paper, and ribbon and fancy bows. But God certainly wrapped his Love for us, in the most remarkable of ways, in the holiest, and purest of packages. An infant, born to two faithful people, who would love him and care for him: who would give him the name he was to be called, and teach him everything he needed to know, about the world; about life and human suffering, about using his power to love, to heal injustice, to mend broken bodies and spirits, to teach the world, really, how to love one another, and to reject the temptations of evil. This was God's gift to us: the birth of our Savior. Jesus Christ: Our King whose coming was foretold by the prophets, Our Lord; whose birth was heralded by the Angels and celebrated by the Heavenly Host, The moment, that, thanks to the Messengers and all of their wonderful, rich, powerful, glorious messages, we know and believe, beyond the shadow of a single doubt, all of Heaven and all of Nature sang.

Merry Christmas to you all. Thanks be to God. Amen.