

Isaiah 9:2-7 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>2</sup><sup>[a]</sup> The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.

<sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.

<sup>4</sup> For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

<sup>5</sup> For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

<sup>6</sup> For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup> His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness

from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Luke 2:1-20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

## The Birth of Jesus

**2** In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered.<sup>4</sup> Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

## The Shepherds and the Angels

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,<sup>[a]</sup> the

Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,<sup>[b]</sup> praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

## **“Jesus, Our Baby Brother”**

### **Kerra Becker English**

*Family.* During the holidays, we can easily over-sentimentalize what it means to be a family. The advertisers know how to add just the right amount of family togetherness to pull on our heartstrings. We try to think of a present to “wow” Mom or Dad, even when they already have absolutely everything. We send cards to uncles and aunts and cousins that we don’t hear from any other time of year. And then, we go all out decorating, and celebrating, and frantically making our lists and checking them twice – all with the best thoughts of making connections with the people that we love.

But expecting to realize that perfect family moment at Christmas can be exactly what leaves us feeling let down when it doesn’t happen quite the way we had hoped. Maybe there’s a fight about setting up the tree. Maybe there’s a comment made that we shouldn’t have invited Great-Uncle Bob to spoil the mood again this year. Maybe you feel left out, or overlooked, or underappreciated. By the time all the wrapping paper is bagged up and the dishes have been washed and the last guest has gone home, the warm feelings that we hoped to have can be lost, forgotten in the frenzy of it all.

But that’s not how it has to be. It’s taken me years to learn that, and I can still get hooked into the madness. The pressure is real. And the gap between what we want our family to be and who they really are will always grow to be as wide as we allow it to become.

It helps me though to remember that even Jesus had a crazy family. Look at all they did at Christmas! Well, it wasn't quite known as Christmas then. But the birth of Jesus was about as crazy of a birth story as there ever was. I could tell you about bringing my infant son home for the first time in a snow storm that was closing roads in Pennsylvania. I could tell you about going into labor at a borrowed lake cabin two hours away from the birth center the morning my daughter was born. I could tell you about the Christmas when our family and our friends that we were celebrating with all got the stomach flu and we tried to cook Cornish game hens anyway. But angels, and shepherds, and giving birth in a stable... that wins, for sure. No matter what Mary put in her birth plan, no matter how prepared she was for Christmas to come, it was going to happen the way that it was going to happen – like those events always happen - in chaos and craziness.

And somehow, amidst all that, they seemed to roll with it, which isn't easy for any of us to do. Maybe it helps to have angel choruses telling you not to be afraid, and singing glorious songs about love, and joy, and peace. I could use an improved soundtrack to some of my Christmases past.

But for tonight and for every Christmas, I find it important to tell the story, just like my family told me stories of my birthday, and I tell my kids their stories on their birthdays. We tell the story about Jesus, this baby, our brother, because those stories remind us of how he came to us, and who he turned out to be, and what his life means to all those touched by his story.

Jesus was and is the fulfillment of some pretty big promises. This birth is special for oh so many reasons. This is the one who came to save us, Jesus, whose very name means Savior. He will bring joy. He will bring peace. He will teach of God's love, not just for some, but for all people.

The shepherds, who represent the hard-working poor are called by angels to come celebrate. The wise men who were learned and have plentiful resources are guided by a star to come celebrate. The parents themselves are connected to nobility, and yet are called to this adventure from meager circumstances. They are surrounded by animals, and travelers, and the noisy commotion of real life. His birth means so much to so many people, and his life will be the same.

Tonight and tomorrow, families will gather, exchange gifts, eat lots of food, and honor traditions old and new. Some families will be genuinely joyful, others will be smiling through gritted teeth, and yet others may be out working or just barely getting by. I can only make guesses. I don't know what goes on behind the closed doors of your Christmas mornings. Maybe tomorrow that thing will happen that you talk about for years to come – like the time we spent Christmas day eating hoagies from a convenience store and swimming in a hotel pool. Or maybe it will be just another not so memorable holiday.

We make meaning from the things that happen through us and happen to us. That's what human beings are – the meaning makers. The stories told and re-told about Jesus remind us that his life was full of meaning and that we can borrow meaning from knowing that story as part of our own repertoire. His story becomes a part of our story when we celebrate it year after year. We tell his story because it leads us to hear the angel choruses in the backdrop of our own celebrations.

“Hail the heaven born Prince of Peace. Hail the Son of Righteousness. Light and life to all he brings. Risen with healing in his wings.”

Doing the same thing we do every year, telling the same stories we tell every year, hanging that one particular ornament, eating grandma's special cookies that she ONLY makes at Christmas, all those things remind us of who we are, and they inevitably take us to where we want to be.

Some will tell you that religion is just repetition, and in part that is correct. It is the repeating and repeating of the same stories, and yet those stories become real only as they grow and change with us. They can be heard anew, even when we know every single detail by heart. Let me tell you a secret – just about every pastor has spent time stressing this week about how to tell the story again this year, but this year I was also reminded that it doesn't really matter what details I put around it, what is important is that you hear Jesus' story, the same story, the Luke passage that we know, with the details that are filled in by Christmas Carols, children's books, and singing *Silent Night* by candlelight in that warm glow of familiar faces. We don't need a new story, we need the same story. Our brother Jesus, was born in a stable in Bethlehem, and it is good news, really really good news for all of us who long to know God's love. Amen.

**CHRISTMAS EVE... (Rev. Rex A.E. Hunt)**

Christmas Eve is a time for candlelight.  
It is a time when one desires little more  
than family and soft music.

Who can say what passes through our hearts on Christmas Eve?  
Strange thoughts.  
Undefinable emotions.  
Sudden tears.

Christmas Eve is a time to be quietly glad.  
It is a time to wonder, to give thanks,  
and of quiet awakening to beauty  
that still lives on through the strife  
of a war-torn world.

And Christmas Eve is also a time for memories and remembering.

For some, the memories are of loved family members  
who have died, and the festive season  
makes the pain of those losses ever more real.

For others, the memories are of happier times than we know now,  
felt as the anguish of broken relationships,  
the insecurity around employment,  
the anxiety of illness or poor health,  
or the emptiness of loss.

All these feelings are with us this night as we gather in this sacred place.  
Here we are safe to feel what we feel:  
to acknowledge our sadness,  
to share our concern,  
to release our anger,  
to face our emptiness,  
and still to know that God by all names, known and unknown,  
is made present in the caring thoughts and deeds of others.

So let us be and share and remember and receive,  
assured that we are not alone. (((Time of Silence)))

**Communion:**

**Invitation to the Table - KERRA/WORDS OF INSTITUTION**

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Responsive

Kerra : The Lord be with you.

*People: And also with you.*

Melissa: Lift up your hearts.

*People: We lift them to the Lord.*

Kerra: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

*People: It is right to give God thanks and praise.*

**Thanksgiving (Rev. Rex A.E. Hunt – adaptation)**

Kerra: The sacred emerges for us everywhere:  
in the rhythm of the oceans  
in the magnificence of the stars,  
in the beauty of all beings.

**Melissa: We are grateful for the gifts of our story.**

Kerra: In this season, we sing the song of angels who quiet our fears.  
We find ourselves in the company of shepherds and magi  
who search for what is coming to birth  
in unlikely places among unlikely people.

**Melissa: In the company of courageous parents and bold ancestors,  
we dare to birth the holy among us.**

Kerra: In the divine, we live and move and have our being.  
For all that is born of a sacred love,  
we give our thanks and praise.

**Melissa: In Jesus of Nazareth, we see new possibilities,  
new ways of being in the world.**

Kerra: He was moved by the plight of the poor.  
He made his home with the homeless  
and shared his table with those  
who could not command a seat at any meal.  
He dreamed of a world where enemies  
learned to love one another,  
where the abundance of creation was shared fairly,  
and where love was the law of every land.

On this night God's Spirit was seen as one of us:  
a baby needy and naked,  
wrapped in Mary's arms,  
born into poverty and exile,  
to proclaim the good news to the poor,  
and to let the broken victims go free.

Therefore, with the woman who gave Jesus birth,  
and the man who raised him as his son,  
With the shepherds who came to see this astonishing child,  
And the animals who surrounded him in his manger bed,  
and with all women and men, and angels and archangels throughout the ages,  
we praise God, saying:

**Melissa: Holy, holy, holy, Lord,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

Kerra: Ever Present God, pour out your Holy Spirit on these gifts of bread and wine, that the bread  
we break and the cup we bless may make us one body in community....

The Lord's Prayer

Unison – Kerra starts

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name....

Sharing of the Bread: (Kerra)

This is the bread of life, given to sustain the people of the world. Let us share this bread and be strengthened, that we, in the way of the Christ, might bring hope and peace to the world.

Sharing of the Cup: (Melissa)

This is the cup of love, given to sustain the people of the world. Let us share this cup and be strengthened, that we, in the way of the Christ, might bring joy and love to the world.

**Intinction – serving the line**

Prayer after communion - Kerra