

CHRISTMAS EVE MEDITATION 2025 Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-20. Dr. Janet Loman

Seven hundred years before the baby Jesus was born, the great prophet Isaiah and the people of Judah found themselves surrounded by war and an encroaching enemy, Assyria. They were war-torn and weary, and lived in constant fear of powerful kings. They had lost trust in God and God's ways and had digressed into sin and disorder. It seems that, throughout history, there has been a gap between the world "as it is" and the world "as God desires it to be." Yet, God was faithful, and sent a message to Isaiah for the people of Judah, and promised that

The people, walking in the darkness of oppression, would see a great light,
and God would make their nation great again. . . that

Their burden would be taken away, and

God would send a child who would one day be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,
and this child would reign forever.

A baby, the ultimate sign of vulnerability, holds the power to alter human destiny! Here is their wonder, and hope -- that a mere child can work for good in the midst of human violence and fear of the unknown! "How can this possibly happen?"

We, as humans, simply try to understand the unfathomable.

When we watch a magician demonstrate his tricks onstage, we, the audience, see only what we expect to see.

The shepherds certainly did not expect to see the glory of God through the angels that wondrous night -- The dramatic brilliance of the light that shattered the black glass of darkness, the wonder of the Angel "bringing good news of great joy to all the people," and that they would find "a child wrapped in bands of cloth lying in a

manger," the sudden angelic commotion, and the sheer joy of the angels singing "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace!" It was a life-changing announcement for the shepherds, who had been quietly tending their sheep. There is no way that this cataclysmic event could be copied by a magician, for it was not a sleight-of-hand trick -- it was an act of our Loving God. . . . a miracle. The act was not a **physical** upheaval of the natural world, such as an earthquake, but an astounding declaration that the **social** order of the world would be overturned. The fear of the shepherds is not toward some earthly power that intends to do harm toward them -- their 'fear' is pure awe before a Presence that is far beyond human comprehension or knowledge, far greater than our fragile, flawed, and mortal selves -- they see the omnipotent power of God, who is able to pierce the darkness with a blast of unbelievable light and call on his angels to bring tidings of hope and new life to his people. The presence of God is unmistakable.

Angels are powerful spirits whom God sends into the world to wish us well. Since we don't expect to see them, we don't notice as an angel spreads its glittering wings over us, but we will suddenly say things like,

"It was one of those days that made you feel good just to be alive," or

"I had a hunch everything was going to turn out all right," or

"I don't know where I ever found the courage."

The shepherds somehow feel that "everything is going to turn out all right."

Shepherds were held in low esteem by the people in those days, suggesting that they were certainly not upper-class, not even middle-class in their society. They were the often-forgotten members of the social order in Palestine, for they spent weeks at a time in the wilderness, searching for quiet pastures and clear streams for their

flocks. They were largely ignored and would hardly be considered trustworthy to spread such news; yet God disagrees and chooses these lowly ones to hear the message of God through the angel voices. They become the inspired ones to spread the glorious word, and all who hear it are amazed by their message!

Thus, the ancient prophecy of Isaiah has come to pass: From the deep darkness of night the penetrating light of God shines before them in incredible promise and joy! A child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders, and he will bring peace.

Yes, the birth of Jesus will honor the extraordinary freedom we have been given in creation, but we must acknowledge that the work of Christ is not carried out by swooping in and sorting out problems for us. Peace is dependent on God's presence in our personal lives. In this world now, more than ever, we need the peace of God and a sense of goodwill toward each other. We need to remember this night of wonder, and realize that -- as Christians, God has made us to be instruments of peace through this tiny child.

When Mary visited Elizabeth to share her joy in their pregnancies, they had not expected to see the miraculous gift each had been given -- the child, John, to be born of a barren woman, and the holy child, Jesus, who would be born by the Holy Spirit -- and Mary exclaimed, "Nothing is impossible with God!" And by turning the phrase we can also say, "Everything is possible with God!"

These words help us to remember that from the beginning of creation, God has been working to reconcile his people. God invites us to be so close to him that we become as like him as we can possibly be. Everything is possible for us if we live into the presence of God, to guide our thoughts and actions in every situation; to trust that

God is working out reconciliation and peace in this world, even in the midst of the angry and broken world that is presented to us today.

We look to God, who has remained faithful through the ages, and to Jesus, who has taught us how to love, and how to forgive as he has forgiven us. When we are in Christ, there is nothing that cannot be forgiven. Love has a mighty strength that will always win.

If you believe you are unworthy of love or respect or have made mistakes and feel there is no way to make your life right again, look to the Manger. What do you expect to see? You might first notice his tiny hands and feet, his perfect nose and rosebud lips - and beautiful, curious newborn eyes that connect with yours, as he tries to find meaning in the wonder of your face -- but so much more than this, you will find the Child who is God in the Manger, who will become our Servant King and Good Shepherd, who guides our way. You will see our Savior, who loves you so deeply and has so much hope for you that he gave his life for you. There is no greater love, for lying in the manger is the Divine Love that has made all things possible.

This Christmas Eve, ponder in your heart with Mary the miracle of the Christ Child and all the things that are possible in your life -- for in this Year of our Lord 2025, we are still celebrating the possibilities, singing "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace!!" May we always sing these words of the angels in praise to our Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, and in full harmony with all the people on earth. Amen.

