

“This is the irrational season,  
When love blooms bright and wild.  
Had Mary been filled with reason,  
There’d have been no room for the child.”

After using her poetry on the First Sunday of Advent, I have returned to the words of Madeleine L’Engle, poet and author and spiritual guide.

The irrational season. Isn’t that the truth?!  
If we stop to think about it, I mean if we really scrutinize and analyze, none of it makes sense. This night, this Feast, the birth we celebrate — none of it makes sense.

But God knew best. God knew what was needed. God knows what we need.

And so we come, with countless others all around the world, to listen to the story, and to try again to understand the meaning of the gift. Children have been waiting for this night since Halloween, since before Halloween, and if we have embraced the themes of Advent, we’ve been waiting, too.

Waiting.

It can be hard work if it’s done well, but it’s not an unfamiliar posture for the people of God. If we believe in God, or if we want to believe in God, we are always waiting and hoping — waiting for God to be revealed to us, and hoping that God will take everything that’s wrong in life and make it right. Waiting and hoping to know that God exists and that God is God.

Our forebears in faith knew this waiting. Israel had been waiting for a Messiah for generations. The people had been hoping for a savior who would crush their Roman oppressors and deliver them to their rightful place as the chosen people of God. And how did God respond?

An unwed, pregnant, teenaged virgin went down from the town of Nazareth with her fiance to Bethlehem. They went to be counted in a census that had been ordered by the civil

government. While they were in Bethlehem the young woman went into labor, and since they couldn’t find any other place to stay, the baby was born in a stable — probably a cave that had been turned into a place for the stalling of oxen and donkeys and cows. There was no bed, so the baby was laid in a feeding trough filled with straw.

And this was the one. This was the object of all of the waiting and all of the hoping. This was the Messiah. A newborn baby delivered by an unwed virgin in a dark and dirty stable, and put to bed in an animal’s food-crib filled with straw. How could this be?

It could be because God knew best. God knew what was needed. God knows what we need.

I believe that what God wants most is to find a place at the very center of every human life — not to force himself into that place, or to be taken in because of guilt or fear, but to be welcomed in, wholeheartedly, to abide and to transform every aspect of that life. I believe that this is what God wants most.

But God knew how most of us would respond: “God wants to be born into this human life? God wants to abide with me? I don’t think so. Not this life. This life is no five-star destination. This is a life filled with rough edges and wrong decisions. I don’t always tell the truth. I don’t always treat other people with the respect that is the birthright of every child of God. I’ve done things in my life that have left a trail of wreckage in my wake. The creator of the universe and the Lord of all of life wants to be born into and to abide at the center of this life? I don’t think so.”

God knew that’s how most of us would respond. So God chose Mary. Young, innocent, unlikely Mary, who said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” And then, having chosen Mary to be the mother of the baby, God chose a stable for the birthing place. It seems irrational. At first, it doesn’t make any sense. But this was no accident, and it was no mistake.

God knew best.  
God knew what was needed.  
God knows what we need.

What have you done to make a mess of your life? What do we do to distort the image of God in which we were created? What do you do that blurs the Truth of God? In what ways do we deny the sovereignty of God?

God sent a savior in the form of a single, helpless human being, because God wants to enter and to redeem the life of every human being. God chose a tiny, helpless baby, born in a stable, because God wanted you and me to know that the gift was meant for us, even us — weak, unfaithful, double-minded, ashamed, dirty, foolish, unworthy, self-satisfied, insincere — even us.

Our lives are the stables that have been chosen as the place where the Christ Child will be born and revealed to the world. God has done this for us. God is waiting to do this for us — even us. May every single one of us know and believe tonight that Christ has been born for us, in us, and may God bless us, every one.

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