



Christmas Eve Meditation 2023

Isaiah 9:2-3, 6-7

Christmas Creativity

Prayer: O God by your word you create the world, by your graciousness you created and have given to all of us the Christ child, by your Spirit you encourage the deep creativity which is a walk of discipleship. Enliven our hearts and imaginations tonight that we may embrace a role for ourselves in the creative good news you are bringing the world this year...

Allow me to invite you to consider the creativity going on all around you. We have arranged for a visual meditation on creativity in nature. These beautiful Bentley snowflakes are some of the first photographs of snowflakes successfully recorded in large numbers, by Wilson Bentley in Vermont beginning January 15, 1885. He usually went by his nickname, “Snowflake Bentley.” Snowflake was not creating the snowflakes; he was creating images of them. Creativity built on creativity; he created over 5000 images.

The artistic medium here is water and temperature, a camera and film. And in this combination, there is nearly an infinite variety of snowflake masterpieces. The consensus now is that theoretically snowflakes can be the same, but it is unlikely¹

All this takes place just when water is cold...

Building on this we could consider what water renders when it is liquid (lakes, oceans, water for plants and animals), and what it does when it is a gas (steam engines, rain clouds, tsunamis). And we could consider all the other creativity that happens with other elements in our world, earth, air, and fire. Beautiful and terrifying.

I would like to ask you to remember this, put a pin in it, we are going to come back to the theme of creativity. Expansive creativity.

Creativity happens in human life as well as in nature. We live our lives creatively, all of us. In the choices we make, by how we decide to show up in the world where we place ourselves, the qualities of our relationships – our proximity to others. These are creative decisions, every day.

Let me remind you that if you know the story of your own birth, you know it because someone told it to you. No one remembers their own birth, it is a story others share with you, and it will come to you through the lens of what is important to the people who tell it to you. I heard about my birth from two sources: my mother and my father. There were other witnesses, but I have

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<https://www.its.caltech.edu/~atomic/snowcrystals/alike/alike.htm#:~:text=The%20short%20answer%20to%20the%20not%20find%20any%20exact%20duplicates.>

never heard from them directly. My parents emphasized different things when they told the story: Mom talks about how she was one of the first people to try the, at the time new, Lamaze method of natural childbirth, she also talks about the other mothers on the maternity ward. My Dad talked about walking out of the hospital with me in his arms and how I sneezed 3 times the first-time sunlight hit my face, the same way he always does in the sun. Two sources, emphasizing aspects of the same story.

We have two accounts of the nativity story: one from Luke, one from Matthew. One birth, two stories about it.

If you are reading Luke's gospel, this gospel emphasizes how the good news is revealed to the poor first. The shepherds are humble folk, out all night watching the sheep, caretaking. Luke emphasizes the displacement of the holy family, the ridiculousness of lodging Christ the King with the animals, how the world gets it wrong sometimes, and how Jesus' nature is revealed in humbled circumstances.

Luke's gospel goes on to emphasize how the glory of God is revealed in humble people, in ordinary lives, everywhere. Jesus goes through his ministry noticing faith among unlikely people, at inconvenient moments, not among the wealthy and powerful, but among those in humbler circumstances who know good news when they hear it. And of course, Jesus rides into Jerusalem, not on a Chariot drawn by war horses like Pilate does, rather he comes in on a donkey. Embodying spiritual peace, children greet him and wave palm branches. It is the simple things for Luke's gospel. Jesus is a humble man who lived a life like we do, with simple pleasures and feelings like ours. His resurrection offers new life to all of us. All. Of. us.

Matthew's gospel emphasizes the politics going on at the time: Herod's conversation with the magi, foreign travelers from the east. How insecure Herod is with this new kind of king born in his realm, how he sought to remove him. The horrific decree that all the male children under the age of two should be killed. An act of terrorism, designed to intimidate, and to consolidate his power.

Matthew's gospel goes on to focus on the issue of Authority and the nature of God's Kingdom. The question of what kind of authority Jesus is: his nature, divine and human. One of my favorite commentators Jack Dean Kingsbury, argues that the question of authority is the key to this whole gospel. What kind of Kingdom is the kingdom of God? How do we live in that kingdom, while we also live where we are?

Which is where I would like to bring you back to the question of creativity. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago, is a historical fact. But there is a well spring of deeply creative responses to this event.

Snowflakes are just water and temperature. What creative activity does the gift of the Christ child engender in your life in 2023? I am asking because I do not know. I do know that the possibilities are infinite, like the possibilities of differences among snowflakes are endless.

Just this month, in the short weeks I have been with you since December 1, I have heard people say that this is a story about...

- Caring for the poor
- Sharing what we have,
- Making space or room for someone
- Immigration, migration

- Munciple government, taxes,
- The conflict in the Holy Lands
- Parenting
- Waiting for a child to be born,
- Grandparenting, great grandparenting
- An affirmation of the natural world, with the inclusion of the animals in the story
- Sharing a gift that cannot be repaid
- Sharing a gift given with love

If you are a child here this evening remember that you have choices you can make, and the choices you make can be creative. Your life can be a creative response to your circumstances and opportunities. If you are an adult, you already understand some of what it means to be accountable for your choices and circumstances – how they shape the person you are now. We are as different as snowflakes from each other, and we are presented with different choices and opportunities every day.

Christmas creativity is not just up to you. You have a creative collaborator. God is highly creative. So creative – it is God's identity. God is the creator, Jesus is the created, manifest child of God, the Holy Spirit is nothing if not creative as she moves. It is a trinity of creativity.

The thing about Christmas is that going all the way back, it has been a deeply creative time of the year. There is a well spring of deeply creative responses to the birth of the Christ child. What does it mean, what will it mean this year? Christmas creativity is not just for a day; it is for a lifetime. It is a gift. It is your gift. Tonight!

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