

A Christmas Eve homily.....Dec. 24, 2017 What a surprise! Cara B. Hochhalter

(The Christmas scriptures have been read, interspersed with carols.)

What a surprise! Our Christmas story is full...of surprise! Imagine young Mary being visited by an angel...and then *what* news she was given...*her* baby would bring *justice and peace in a time of poverty and warring*... *her* baby would be the breaking into the world of Divine Love...and she would be called forever blessed...surprising?

And then Joseph....poor Joseph, he must have been dumbfounded and yet to his credit...he goes along. He does the right thing...he stays with her.

How about the shepherds....you know there is *surprise* in the Bible whenever they use the word, "Lo!" Not LOL but LO! "And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them! telling these sheep-herders to find a baby in a manger...*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward all!* Surprise!

And then Herod...actually much later than our telling of it, Herod was surprised to see royal-looking magi from outside of the neighborhood asking odd questions about a king? What!? A baby king who sounded like a threat to his ego and power? He was surprised!

The wise ones must have been surprised to follow the star with their expensive gifts...not practical ones like you have probably all heard in jokes... no, they brought gold, frankincense and myrrh...to a little tiny baby wrapped in cloths in a trough used to feed animals...surrounded by down-to-earth, common-sense...beautiful people; a young girl, a carpenter...and some shepherds. Surely this was a surprising kind of king!

What a precious story... You can see the surprise in the gestures of the figures on the cover of the bulletin.

What is the surprise for us right now? A little baby represents God breaking into our humanity not in glamour, not in wealth, not in the White House or the upper echelons of a corporation...although God probably longs to break into those places... but that we are informed and inspired by a child who would impact the world for peace...for nonviolence, Jesus never advocated the use of weapons...but reached across differences in compassion, love and forgiveness. This is not wimpy, sentimental, and Hallmark card-like...this is startling and transforming!

And if we grasp the surprise of the story...then we allow ourselves and our world to be surprised again... by the in-breaking of God in current times and in our own lives.

Do you remember the incredible true story that took place during WWI...on Christmas Eve? In 1914, from the muddy trenches of war...there was a "no Man's Land" that divided enemy soldiers...but also became the place of a Christmas truce. It is said that someone, started singing Silent Night...and then The First Noel...and then peace broke out. German, British, French and Belgian...they reached across the abyss to embrace, to shake hands and wish each other... Merry Christmas, Fröhliche Weihnachten...

In the name of *this* story...peace broke out...if only for a few hours...but God was surely in that place!

Let's not let this Christmas story become merely a story for children...let it continue to hold surprise for all of us...let it be a startling story that you want to tell...and live! Christ is born again as we bridge differences and recognize our humanness and our commonality; our desire for equality, fairness and dignity for every person.

Right now, there is a movement beginning called "The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival"... A Black preacher named Rev. Dr. William Barber II from North Carolina calls himself a conservative because he wants to *conserve* the Divine tradition of doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God... from Micah in the Bible... Barber says this is not a left vs right, conservative vs liberal movement...this is a moral movement to bring fairness to our society where there are 40 million people in poverty in our country and 19 million in extreme poverty....This little baby to whom we sing our carols and hold in love and prayer this night...told us repeatedly to care for those in need... and so often, we are the ones in need of the kind of inclusive love and forgiveness that Jesus inspired.

And so, the surprising thing for us this night...might be that our hearts are opened to this Infinite Love, born always and in every moment.... that we can *expect* what seems impossible...the in-breaking of God on earth, with peace and good will toward all people and all of creation...

Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night!