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XmasEveC21  
St. Mark's, LaGrange

This night was not guaranteed to happen.

It feels like it was.

Your memories of dark nights  
    in a warm house by a glowing tree.  
Your memories of bright mornings and happy shouts  
    alongside the tearing of paper.

All of these make us feel as if Christmas was always bound to happen.

But Christmas is a miracle.

The story goes like this.

    In the beginning,  
        when darkness covered the face of the deep,  
            God Almighty said to the chaos,  
“Let there be order and light.”  
    And there was order  
    and there was light.

And life and light came into being.  
And it was very good.

Sometime after that,  
God said, "Let there be a people to call my own.  
A particular people  
through whom I will bless all people, everywhere."

And God chose a people  
and rescued them from all their faithless sin.

There were kings who were evil,  
and yet close to the heart of God.  
There were fearful and worried hearts,  
and God spoke peace into their midst.  
There were people who thought they had to follow all the rules,  
all the time,  
all perfectly well,  
and God said, "I require not burnt offerings,  
but mercy.  
I desire not thousands of rams  
or ten thousand rivers of oil.

Instead: do justice,  
love kindness,  
and walk humbly with your God."

Into this world,  
Christmas comes.  
Into this world,  
Jesus is born.

In other words,  
into a world much like our own.

Perhaps exactly like our own.

We have been,  
forever and always,  
we have been trying to find a way to save ourselves.

We have been saying that there are no rules;  
we have been saying that the rules are all that matter;  
we have been saying that there ought to be a way out of this mess.

Instead,  
God is born into the mess.

This is the last Christmas Eve sermon I will preach  
as rector of this parish.

My twelfth Christmas Eve,  
one of which was recorded and edited and uploaded to the internet.  
This one,  
streamed live to live on the internet forever.

Much has changed in the 11 years,  
the 12 Christmases that I have been at St. Mark's.

I started with Jane Dorman by my side.  
She was here for three quarters of my ministry.  
And thank God for that.  
Different acolytes,  
grown up and gone.  
New ones arriving short and uncertain,  
but always wanting to play with the candle wax!

Slow changes,  
fast changes,  
but always changes.

Twelve Christmases,  
and not one alike.  
Twelve Christmases,  
and God born into every messy one.

But it was not guaranteed to happen.  
God **chose** for it to happen.

The other day,  
a dear member of this parish  
told me about her grandchildren,  
going out to the beach to build a wall against the ocean.

Every day of their weeklong trip,  
two tiny children would take sand  
and pile it up against the tide.

The rains came some,  
but mostly it was the ocean itself that tore down their wall.

But every morning,  
they started again.

Every morning  
they built their little wall.

For them,  
there was no tragedy in the daily loss,  
there was only a new chance to build.

God is born into that mess.

The mess is not just the losses and the grief we have,  
but even the playful work of children,  
doomed to crumble under its own weight  
or under the weight of the relentless waves of life.

They chose,  
day after day,  
to build the wall again.

They might have given up on it,  
but instead they chose to build,  
every single day.

God chooses Christmas,  
every single day.

It was not guaranteed to happen.  
We had our chances;  
prophets and laws,  
showing us the way to salvation.  
We had each other to love and we had ourselves to offer.

It ought to have been enough, it seems to me.

“Love the Lord your God  
with all that you have  
and all that you are.”

Not easy to do,  
but simple enough to try.

Instead we needed Christmas.  
We needed the miracle.  
We needed God to be born into the world.

Look around you tonight.  
Pay attention tomorrow morning  
and in the weeks and months to come.

See if you can spot God being born into the world.  
See if you can't find endless places,  
desperate for the Incarnation of God.

For God Almighty to be born,  
for the Light of the World to be born into the midst of darkness.

It wasn't guaranteed to happen.

It's a miracle,  
Christmas.

God chooses Christmas.  
God chooses to be born.  
God chooses salvation.

Again  
and again  
and again.

From the very first day,  
"Let there be light."

From that very first day,  
until the last wave crashes into the shore,  
and Kingdom comes,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

From that day,  
to this day,  
until the very last day,

God is born into the world.