

The Message of Christmas For A Weary World

As we prepare for another Advent and Christmas season, it is tempting to look around us at all this year has brought and to feel fatigue, disappointment, and grief. Our celebrations will not look the same this year, and we mourn what will be different while (hopefully) weighing that against the steps we are called to take for safety in love for ourselves and our neighbor. I've heard many of us say that of all the things COVID-19 has taken from us, it seems unfair for it to take Christmas, too.

That is a sentiment that I can appreciate, dear ones. I hear you. We are sick, and sad, and angry, and hurting, and we miss what we once had. But it was on a night just like this that God was born in this world. It was in a broken, exhausted, horrified world that God showed up. Two thousand years ago a tyrant named Emperor Augustus reigned using oppression and terror to force peasants like Mary and Joseph to bend to his will. Two thousand years ago Mary and Joseph, tired, exhausted, and afraid, travelled over 90 miles on rocky terrain to Bethlehem, only to be turned away by almost everyone in Joseph's hometown. On the verge of giving birth with nowhere to lay their heads, Mary and Joseph finally found shelter in a stinky, dirty stable. It was unfair, it was unimaginable, and that's the climate in which God shows up.

The rule-breaking part of all of this is that God doesn't show up in the palace, or wearing a crown, or even within the walls of a house. Emmanuel, God with us, is about drawing people together in the face of tragedy and violence and fear—in the face of brokenness. This story of God entering our world and loving us and knitting us together and filling us with hope is one that feels good to hear every year, but we are uniquely equipped to hear this news this year. In fact, it is possible that in 2020 we are better prepared to hear this news than we have been before. We so often let the cultural (and fun!) parts of the Christmas season distract us from the true celebration that we are called to in faith. The good, gospel news of Christmas is that brokenness, inequality, sinfulness, fear, and exhaustion cannot stop the arrival of God. COVID-19, racism, unrest, division, fear...none of it can stop God's arrival. None of it will keep Christmas—the arrival of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ right here in our midst—from happening.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.