

Christmas Eve 2021—It's All So Very Ordinary
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It all seemed so very ordinary...a census ordered by Emperor Augustus.

A couple who traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem because that was the man's hometown.

A woman who was pregnant.

A town in which all the guest rooms were full because so many people had returned for the census.

A stable in the back of the inn where there was a manger to feed the animals.

The birth of a child in the middle of the night and bands of cloth to wrap him.

Shepherds who lived in the fields doing their jobs tending their sheep. *It is all such a very ordinary story—ordinary people, living their ordinary lives doing ordinary, everyday things.*

But we who are on this side of that story know that something extraordinary happened in those ordinary people, living their ordinary lives, doing ordinary things.

God entered that ordinary story, with an extraordinary promise that the child whom the pregnant woman was carrying would save the world.

God entered that ordinary manger, with an extraordinary baby whose life, death, and resurrection, would bring unconditional grace, forgiveness, and love to a hurting world.

God sent extraordinarily good news to ordinary shepherds doing their ordinary jobs on an ordinary night that turned out to be the most extraordinary night in human history.

You see, that's how God works. God doesn't choose to enter the world through the powerful and the perfect. God doesn't wait to come until everything is merry and bright.

But it is in the ordinariness of life that the holy enters. It is when you are living your ordinary life doing ordinary, everyday things that God joins your story.

God comes to you when you're vacuuming your house, doing your laundry, packing your lunch, making the bed, doing your homework, paying your bills. And God also comes when your house is a mess, and your clothes are dirty, and you can't find anything in the fridge for lunch, and the bed is unmade, and you procrastinated on your homework, and forgot to pay that bill. God comes when life is...normal. Ordinary.

I think that perhaps what we all need to remember tonight is that God doesn't only come in extraordinary circumstances. And God doesn't come close only at Christmas. We seem to put so much expectation into Christmas—the most wonderful time of the year—maybe you think, that's when I'll really feel Christ's closeness. Maybe when the stockings are hung by the chimney with care. Maybe when all the people I love are together. Maybe when all the presents are unwrapped, and our bellies are full. Maybe I'll finally feel close to Jesus tonight, at this Christmas Eve worship service. But if God—if Jesus—waited to enter our stories when everything was right in our lives and fine in the world, honestly, God would never show up.

You see, we don't have to do mental gymnastics to get into the right head or heart space for God to enter. We don't need wealth or status or an Instagram-worthy celebrations. Just like God came to Mary and those shepherds and this world in ordinariness, the only thing that it takes for God to show up in our lives is our imperfection, our humility, our "leastness."

And you know, the church isn't some extraordinary place where we come to find God. Instead, it's the place where we're reminded of the ordinary places in life that God already is. It is in Christian community that our eyes and ears and heart are awakened to where God enters into our normal, ordinary, everyday lives.

It is here that we remember we belong to God even when the rest of the world reminds us of the places we don't belong.

It is here that we remember how beloved we are even when we don't feel loveable, and even when we have a hard time loving others.

It is here that we are reminded that our lives are caught up in grace, and there's nothing we can do to earn it, but everything we do is in response to it.

It is here that wine and bread become life so that even through taste and smell we sense the radical grace of Jesus Christ.

It is here we are called and equipped for a life of justice, mercy, and peace in a world that so desperately needs it.

It is here that we remember that the ordinary becomes extraordinary because God has entered our stories.

So, have yourself an ordinary Christmas, for that is where God promises to show up. Amen.

Children's message

Brainbows – watch them grow during the service

God's love was too big to contain in heaven, so God came down to earth in someone just like you.

God's love for you grew so much that God came down from heaven into a baby who was just like you. God wanted to show God's love for you so much that God became a person just like you.