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*Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA*

*Christmas Eve*

*December 24, 2022*

*Isaiah 9:2, 6-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:10-14*

Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our creator, Christ our savior born this holy night, and the Holy Spirit who dwells within and among us. Amen.

Long before that very first Christmas, when God chose to show up as a baby in a manger, God made a series of a choices.

God chose to create and love the world into being and God called it good.

God chose to renew the world after the flood and Noah's Ark.

God chose a people and led them out of slavery in Egypt to a land where they were promised abundance.

When those same people were in captivity in Babylon, God chose, according to Isaiah, to do a "new thing" – something so remarkable that there wasn't even a word for it in Hebrew.

God chose kings and judges and prophets and poets to lead and guide and restore God's people.

But it was when God chose to show up as a baby, when God chose to become human, that God chose something even more extraordinary.

God chose a newly born, brown-skinned child, whose family would soon become refugees, to be our savior.

God chose a teenage, unmarried mother to deliver that baby in a stable at the back of an inn in Bethlehem.

God chose shepherds on the margins of society, rather than political or religious authorities, to first experience the good news of great joy for all people. God chose the unexpected, the marginalized, and the humble through which to enter the world.

And then Mary, likely exhausted from the birth, perhaps breastfeeding her infant son, did the only thing that really makes sense when the savior of the world has been born: Mary treasured and pondered in her heart what God's choices meant for her.

Tonight I invite you to do the only thing that really makes sense, as well: to treasure and ponder in your heart what God's choices mean for you.

I imagine that you are coming to the end of 2022 with a series of both joys and losses, happiness and heartache. You might be grateful that the worst of Covid is over and yet weary from the continuing pandemic. You might be reveling in Christmas, yet this year you might have an empty seat at the Christmas dinner table or an empty bank account. This year you might have experienced what you didn't expect; you might have been marginalized; you might have been humbled by other people or events outside of your control.

Ah, but remember...it was through the unexpected, the marginalized, and the humble that God chose to enter the world in the birth of Jesus. And God chooses to be Emmanuel—God-with-us—right now. God is with you whether you have it all together or not. God accepts and welcomes you whether others do or not. Jesus is born for you whether you are conscious of it or not.

God chooses to show up—in the unexpected, on the margins, through the humble—to be in relationship with you and offer you grace, mercy, healing, forgiveness, and life. You don't need to do anything to receive this—God's choice is to give you this ultimate Christmas gift, more important and life-giving than any gift you will ever receive under the tree. Whether you understand it or participate in this gift, God keeps choosing to share it. The only thing you really can do, like Mary, is treasure and ponder in your heart God's choices for you.

Dear child of God, in a world where you aren't always chosen or loved, God keeps choosing and loving you. God chose to be born into the world for you and loves you with the tenderness only a child can. God chooses you—say that to yourself—God chooses me. And God loves you without end. What a Christmas gift to ponder. Amen.