

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas Day) — December 25, 2023

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:14

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. On the sixth day, he created man, the crown of his creation. He was created in the image of God. Throughout the generations, man has tried to understand what it means to be in God’s image, but too often we explain it by making God in our own image. Artists have imagined him as a wise and bearded old man on a throne. The Scriptures themselves describe God with many artistic images: as a shepherd, a king, a woman, a warrior, a rock, a hen, a lion, and a consuming fire. But all these are metaphors.

What we celebrate today is no metaphor. Christmas is the acknowledgement that God became physically incarnate in Jesus Christ. God came into our midst; he sent his Son to take on our human flesh, to live and ultimately to die for the sake of the world.

It is shocking enough that he came in flesh, but God came into the world in “less than ideal” circumstances. He did not arrive as the son of a king or in a priestly household; he came as the son of Mary and Joseph who were people of no import. Mary was very young, a virgin and her pregnancy was a source of gossip and abuse. We know little about Joseph except that he was a simple carpenter. Jesus was born into a world of political and religious upheaval, into a country that was oppressed by a superior power. He revealed himself to be a Messiah that no one expected.

The whole world was created by God for a purpose and as we look all around us we can see God being glorified by everything that he made. Yet, when it came time, God chose to redeem the world by taking on the very image of the creature that has done the most damage — the one that was created in his image but turned away. God came to us in our own human flesh to save the world.

The Christmas story is the outrageous promise of God breaking into the world, not as we would have him, but as he chose to come to us. He was more than an image or idea, but the physical presence of *Emmanuel* — God with us.