

Christmas – December 24, 2019 – Year A
Isaiah 9:2-7 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14(15-20) Psalm 96
the Rev. Deborah Kempson-Thompson

The betrayal was sharp.

She had offered her chaste self to God

as a nun, as a bride of Christ, and

God had given her to someone else!

...
She was "Blazing mad"—

she told God she didn't want Him anymore, either.

For weeks, she found excuses to avoid going to church.

But on Christmas Day, she went to confessionⁱ

In an angry stream to the priest,

she discharged her feelings

about the church and God

letting him know that

she'd been sent by the Mother Abbess as a governess to the children of a wealthy, retired widower with seven children to the country after the death of his wife. The nun had quickly won the affection of the lonely family with her lively, outgoing disposition, but at the end of nine months, she had expected to return to the convent and take the veil.ⁱⁱ

As often happens,

unanticipated circumstances interposed themselves
between the young woman's dreams and plans—
and her reality.

When the widower proposed marriage,

The nun was directed by her Abbess
to marry him for the sake of the children.

Having no knowledge of marital relations,

after her wedding night, the novice felt
she'd been handed over to the world instead of to God,
her chastity stolen and
her dream of becoming fully a nun extinguished.

During her angry tirade to the priest,

her eyes lit upon the Christmas crèche and rested there.

In the manger lay the innocent Baby Jesus.

She came face to face so to speak with another reality,

Emanuel – God with us

in infant form.

There, in the manger

as it had been in Bethlehem,

lay all she would ever need to know

about reality and God:

As she asked herself,

How can I be mad at a baby?

her anger dissipated.

Like Maria Kutschera,

who you might have guessed is Maria von Trapp

of *The Sound of Music* fame,

we might experience confusion and anger

about God, ourselves, and one another

when the complexities and contradictions

of reality collide with our expectations.

When we are surrounded by dashed hopes and plans,

we might pull back and exclaim,

Wait a minute! This is God? Is it?

Our reaction expresses the enduring

tension between our

experience and knowledge of God

and life in a troubled world.

Anxiety and confusion is

swept away on a flood of

reassurance that God, like us,

was born into a troubled world, as well.

How can we be mad at a baby?

Emmanuel – God with Us

Like us, Emanuel, was

subject to growing pains, frustration, failure,

betrayal, and the certainty of death.

Nevertheless,

*Jesus grew both in body and in wisdom,
gaining favor with God and peopleⁱⁱⁱ*

Even his executioners recognized Jesus as *God with us*.

Although our knowledge and experience of God's love

is warm and inviting,

Circumstances, indeed, can be at war with

that knowledge and experience.

But if we let them,

our questions, skepticism, and even our anger

can lead us

again and again to Bethlehem,

where a babe lies peacefully

in its mother's arms

welcomed into the world and

reassured by love.

Like Scrooge who declares when his heart

is broken open by love

for the child Tiny Tim,

*“I will honor Christmas in my heart,
and try to keep it all the year,”^{iv}*

we honor the Incarnation at Christmas by

recognizing and caring for the Christ child born

in each of us.

How can we be mad at a baby?

at Christmas or any other time?

How can we mad at the newborn child in us?

As humorist Dave Barry opined,

“In the old days, it was not called the Holiday Season; the Christians called it 'Christmas' and went to church; the Jews called it 'Hanukkah' and went to synagogue; the atheists went to parties and drank. People passing each other on the street would say 'Merry Christmas!' or 'Happy Hanukkah!' or (to the atheists) 'Look out for the wall!’”

There is a kindness inherent to the Spirit of Christmas—

Kindness to those who are strangers,

those whom we dislike,

those with whom we disagree,

those of whom we disapprove—

We manage to say,

Look out for the wall!

This is how we acknowledge that *God is with us,*

dwelling in peace and goodwill among us.

Emanuel,

the Christ child in each of us

perceives and welcomes with love,

The Christ child in one another—

the homeless lying in animal fodder or worse,

the brokenhearted, addicted, and rejected,

the unemployed and anxious,

the injured, ill, angry, and mean spirited—

As well as those we like and those we love.

Because of the nativity of the Lord in us,

We can keep Christmas in our hearts all year long.

As Laura Ingalls Wilder asserts about the Christmas spirit:

“Our hearts grow tender

...

*and we are better throughout the year for having,
in spirit, become a child again at Christmastime.”^v*

Amen

ⁱ <https://heresyintheheartland.blogspot.com/2013/12/the-real-maria-von-trapp.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0903125/bio>

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 2:52

^{iv} *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens

^v <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/christmas>