

We spend the season of Advent in preparation – you might say we’re fixing to get ready for God’s arrival. As a matter of fact, I would wager the majority of us here tonight have spent the last few days fixing to get ready for dinner, or host family and friends, or watch *National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation*, or get that yard inflatable just right, or prepare heart, mind, and soul for the wave of emotions, some joyous, some not so much, that will fill the coming days.

This week, I’ve read the familiar words of Luke 2 several dozen times. I’ve also read aloud *The Night Before Christmas* to my girls about twenty times. In so doing, I’m beginning to see that our acts of preparation are transitioning into a state of being: readiness. And I think for the first time, I understand Luke’s gospel, and its sequel Acts, in a new light: I see a story of readiness – God’s people, buoyed in God’s presence, ready to respond to human need.

Mary is ready to be a mother to Jesus. Shepherds are ready to receive good news and offer encouragement to new parents. They’re also ready to believe that one, precious life, born to refugee parents in a forgotten part of the world, can SO love, and SO channel God, that humanity will understand, see, and experience God in transformative ways. The shepherds are ready to share good news.

An innkeeper is ready to turn a manger into a makeshift air mattress, and a coffee table into a changing pad, and ladle a few more spoons of soup. Anna and Simeon are ready to proclaim good news they’ve waited a lifetime to share. And listeners for two millennia are ready to believe that God’s audacious and unimaginable truth can shatter the stubbornness, and predictability, and smallness of empire.

But it doesn’t stop there. In Luke’s gospel, another innkeeper is ready to offer rehabilitation to a wounded man long after the Good Samaritan must be on his way. Disciples are ready to fish for people; Zacchaeus is ready to come down from a tree and finally be seen as a child of God; Mary AND Martha are both ready to serve and be present; Daddies are ready to run, sprint even, to sons who have spent too much time chasing rainbows, and those daddies still have more than enough love left over for older brothers who have stayed home to plow the fields, not to mention the daughters our ancient writers didn’t think to name aloud. And best of all, BEST OF ALL, God, in the person of Jesus, is ready to dispense with all

Ready
Bob Stillerman
Christmas Eve, 12/24/2021
Luke 2:1-20



a spiritually
progressive
community
of faith

of the toxicity, over-hyped-masculinity, and unapproachability that the powers-that-be have thrust upon the image of divine. In the Christ, we find One who is ready to be present with us: to weep and grieve with us, to laugh with us, to break bread with us, to live with us – not as something apart from or above us, but with us, as a sibling of God.

In Luke's Gospel, Emmanuel comes into the world in a manger, runs back into it from a pigsty, resurrects as a stranger on the Emmaus Road, and visits all the margins of life in a forgotten Galilee. But whether child, or outcast, or stranger, Emmanuel is received by mamas and daddies, sisters and brothers, friends, kindred, all, with outstretched arms, ready to embrace God's presence. There is a whole world out there ready to live out kin-dom moments by simply modeling the radical hospitality of Jesus.

I guess when you really think about it, the story of Christmas isn't so much about God getting ready to be with us, but rather, it's about us readying ourselves to experience the God who has, is, and will always be present with us.

And it seems to me, when we are ready to be aware of and receive God's presence in our own lives, we too can find God in star-lit mangers, and country crossroads, and treetops, and perhaps, even in this very room.

Good friends, we're entering a season of readiness. May we indeed be, God's people, buoyed in God's presence, ready to respond to human need. May it be so, and may it begin tonight. Amen.