

Let us pray... God of wonder, you are holy. Create a space for holiness in our lives. Usher your Spirit in our midst. Infuse your loving presence in our hearts, calm our minds, and bring us peace. Amen.

Christmas Eve is here... The most wonderful time of the year...

And you are here... You made it to worship, despite your long to do list... the family gatherings you still have to get to, the last-minute gift wrapping, the food that needs to be finished... Or if you are like me, the food that still needs to be started...

And yet, you are here. So, try your best to let go of all the things that are waiting for you, and settle in.

Because being here is such a special gift to give to yourself, as we come together and worship Christ, who is the best gift of all.

And wouldn't it be something if that was all Christmas entailed? Coming together in worship, singing silent night as we light our candles and dim the lights, greeting one another with joy and love...

And yet, Christmas inevitably brings up a lot of stuff... The expectations, feelings and emotions, memories, traditions, and the lingering sadness from the loved ones we have lost. Those who we wish we could hug and hold, but cannot.

And yet the miracle of Christmas shines through in the midst of all those things, and it shines through even when times are hard...

You know like giving birth to a baby in a cold, unsanitary, stable.

And the miracle of Christmas shines through even when we are afraid...

You know, like those shepherds who feared and trembled.

Which is why our beloved Christmas story is so special... Not only does it tell the story of Jesus birth... But it focuses on people... People who were just like you and me, who endured hardships, challenges, and fears...

And the miracle of the story, is that God is with them in the midst of all the things... Mary and Joseph had just walked 90 miles, to be counted by some census, and when they arrived, they couldn't even find a place to stay...

Things must have seemed pretty bleak for them... Things were definitely far from perfect.

And far from perfect, I'm guessing, is what most of us can relate too...

We run out of time to do all the things, something unexpected comes up, plans change, loved ones die, accidents happen, we get sick, we are tired, we are late...

But far from perfect is exactly when God breaks in. Reminding us we don't need to be perfect, or perform in order to receive God's love...

God is with us always... God can create miracles in the bleakest of circumstances, giving us gifts when we least expect it.

The gift of God's grace when we are struggling to keep afloat...

The gift of God's peace when we are mourning a loss...

The gift of hope when all else seems hopeless.

The gift of joy in strange and unexpected places... Like a baby in a manger, who also happens to be the savior of creation.

And I often wonder why God appeared this way, in flesh, on earth...

I have many different ideas and possible answers, but one always seems to shine the brightest... God became human, to be in relationship with us...

A relationship that expands beyond the small window when Christ walked this earth...

Because God continues to be in relationship with us, even thousands of years later...

Through Christ becoming human, God knows how to relate to us, to enter into relationship with us, because God knows exactly what life is all about... The beauty, the pain, the sorrow, and the joy.

God knows you... God sees you.... God is with you.

This is a sacred relationship... One where you are never alone...

And this isn't the only sacred relationship, many relationships are sacred... In particular, the relationships that are rooted in love and trust.

Those relationships are also a gift. People come into our lives and are cherished, they bring meaning to life, and they are meaningful to God.

So meaningful in fact, God decided to become the most vulnerable one in a relationship... A baby... Who needed to be cared for and loved...

A great gift was given. A gift that has since changed life.

And the gifts we give change throughout our lives as well...

And no matter what gift you give... The gift of spending time with family and friends, a store-bought present, a homemade present, or a loving embrace, all gifts are shared in the presence of God's love.

And an integral part of gift giving... is receiving... Receiving others, and the many gifts that flow from God's love.... This is what makes the world go round. Our gifts which were first given to us in Christ.

And the best part of this gift, is that you don't need to do anything extravagant or strive for perfection... All you need to do is be the beautiful person you are.

And while this is true, it also doesn't mean that things are going to be easy... Like we heard in our gospel today... Life, even for Mary, was filled with times of struggle, fear, and unknowns.

Because no matter how much we would like things to be easy, it is just not how the world works.

Jesus didn't come to give us comfortable lives... Instead, he understands the discomfort and is present with us in those times...

Jesus came to be in relationship with us, which gives us meaningful lives...

Meaning that we share with others, through our relationships, and by giving grace...

As Ann Voskamp says, "Grace is the best Christmas gift we always get to give. To those who think differently than us, those who are our neighbors, our enemies, our families.

We get grace this Christmas and we get to give grace this Christmas. Grace isn't a soft, feeble gift, but the most robust, transformative gift of all."

When we give and receive grace, God's grace transforms our hearts.

So that you can fully share your gifts with the world.

As the popular saying goes, "yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift, that's why they call it the present."

This Christmas, may you be present, in the midst of all the Christmas presents.

Because the greatest gift has already been given. Everything is taken care of. And Christmas Eve is here... Amen.