

Welcome again as we gather on this holy night, this blessed Christmas Eve.

It feels different this year, than the past two, doesn't it? Covid isn't gone, as much as we might wish otherwise, but we are in a different place in 2022 than we were before.

It feels special.

Christmas Eve is almost always a special night for many people. People are wearing special clothes. Kitchens are brimming with the smells of special food. A certain kind of excitement fills the air tonight, especially for children or even us adults who are eager to see what gifts they might receive.

Yes, tonight is special. But our Gospel reading this morning is rather ordinary. When we actually read the narrative of Christ's birth, found here in the Gospel of Luke, the details are rather commonplace.

A decree goes out from Emperor Augustus...but lots of decrees went out from the emperors. The Roman Empire maintained its control by keeping tabs—and troops!—on all of its territory.

And Luke gives us the details: Quirinius was governor of Syria, Joseph went to Bethlehem because that's where his family line was from. He went with Mary because he was engaged to her. And while they were in Bethlehem, she gave birth to a son and placed him in a feeding trough because it was the only place, the only shelter they could find.

These details aren't terribly spectacular. A poor man and his young wife are forced to find shelter anywhere they can, like so many others in similar situations. A pregnant woman gave birth and cared for her son as well as she could under the circumstances, like most mothers. It's another birth. Another poor family forced to make the best out of difficult conditions.

At face value, this is an ordinary story—but it is in the *midst* of this ordinary story that the extraordinary happens! It is in this mundane story about a couple and their struggle to survive that God breaks in and changes everything.

The ordinary holds the extraordinary. Isn't that the way God works? Constantly speaking to us, reaching out to us in things we may be tempted to overlook or dismiss as too "ordinary" to be divine?

In ordinary acts, God works through each one of us: welcoming the stranger, caring for one another, feeding, forgiving and clothing one another. If anything or any being is ordinary, it is most certainly us. We are imperfect, sinful and appallingly *mortal* vessels for God to use...and yet, God *does* so, again and again.
And that's not all.

God comes to us in ordinary water. Water that we are immersed in or washed with as we are told we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. That water is not special water that God makes appear in the font. It is the same earthly water that flows through our taps, our waterways and even the little creeks nearby. It is only when God's promises are combined with it that the water becomes extraordinary—only when God acts in the ordinary does it become something that holds the divine.

We see the same in our communion. Our bread and wine, these basic elements, a staple foodstuff and festive drink, that many of us have in our kitchens at home. They are ordinary. We see them on an almost daily basis somewhere or another. And yet when they are here, even pressed into a small wafer, when God's presence and blessing combines with them, they are no longer *ordinary*. They are extraordinary! Still the product of wheat and grapes, and yet also the body and blood of Christ.

And tonight, we celebrate the most significant altering of expectations: what may appear to be an ordinary, helpless newborn child is in fact *God*. This finite form, this baby of no status or power, holds the infinite Creator of the universe!

So, yes, tonight is both special *and* ordinary. Celebrate the special: the food you only eat once a year, the music you reserve for this season, the unique decorations that help your home mark the season as well.

...But celebrate the ordinary, too: the conversations with friends and family, the rituals of washing dishes or doing laundry that don't stop just because it's Christmas, and the people in our community who will need support and caring long after the Christmas trees are taken down and the charity bells stop ringing. It's a both/and, not an either or.

So celebrate!

Christ—the extraordinary savior in our ordinary human flesh—is born!

Amen.