

**“The First Christmas” – Rev. Jennifer Adams**  
**December 24, 2009 – Christmas Eve Service**

Is there anybody here who hasn't heard that story before? Or let me phrase it more positively, who out there has heard, before tonight, that story I just read? A show of hands, good. Looks to me like almost 100% which means that our percentage of “having heard it before” is higher tonight than on any other day in the churches calendar. (I don't even get that many hands at Easter.) Nearly everybody knows that on Christmas the story gives us shepherds and angels and eventually wise men. There's an Emperor and a Governor and a town full of people who are in Bethlehem to register. There are inns and a manger and a multitude of the heavenly host who are singing their Glories to God! And part of why we know all of this is because this season, the gospel story comes at us from lots of directions and not just in church. Cards and music and famous works of art, pageants, yard art and even the occasional television show tell the story. So even if you haven't been in church that many times to hear these words from the gospel of Luke, odds are good you can hear Linus' voice proclaiming the good news, because the Peanuts Christmas Special tells the story too.

And that familiar is part of the comfort and joy of this night. Seeing the angels hover 'round and being able to safely predict that the shepherds will indeed, again this year be “watching over their flocks by night” makes hearts glad. The reunions that happen make us smile. There is something about the known of this night, right down to the familiarity of the hymns that seems to touch us. And letting ourselves be at home in that familiar is an important part of what we do this night.

But more than simply bringing us comfort, “familiar” is actually part of the theological point of what we're doing here. Here's what I mean. Christmas tells us an amazing thing: God chose the familiar on purpose, used it, shaped it, came into the world through it. And not only that but God actually came into the world as the familiar. Just think about it for a minute: God could have come as something the world had never seen before – something all new and shiny and glossy – the mightiest warrior ever, or the most-powerful king the nations had ever known; God could have come as something like a first century superhero who swept in with a mighty, attention getting flash to save the day and all the days that were to come. But instead God, in a rather divinely ironic twist, came as one of the most familiar things possible, something we've all been, maybe the only thing we've all been, a baby. God came as a little tiny baby. Amazing. And brilliant, really in a sneaky sort of way. That first Christmas God used the known, the ordinary (a carpenter, a young woman, some shepherds, a stable, a manger and a baby) to bless and to love the world.

Which tells me that while we tend to be drawn to shiny and glossy and new, maybe it's the familiar that should be getting our attention *now* too. If we're really honest, we're not that different from the first century faithful. We make the same sorts of mistakes. There are lots of days when I look at this world and long for a superhero to sweep in; when I hope for a leader who will be the absolute mightiest and best that the world has ever seen. We do this in our lives too waiting for that one different something that will flash us into a new place or transform things dramatically right before our eyes. But what we celebrate tonight is an entirely different

sort of gift. It's simple and obvious more than it is dramatic. Christmas is God among us as us. A savior who burst into the familiar and infused humanity with holiness. That's the gift. That's incarnation. That's Emmanuel, God with us.

On Christmas Eve the story is hardly new to anyone; we know it almost as well as we know our own – as if it were our own story. And maybe, just maybe it is. We know Mary and Joseph and the shepherds and the angels and we know our own main characters too, our own ordinary, holy families. We know Augustus and Quirinius but we know our leaders too, those who are concerned with registrations and counting people and ruling their corners of the world. And what Christmas tells us is that the familiar, even our familiars forever contain the possibility of, the presence of holiness. So this Christmas, take time to pay attention to now. God is here, with you with me. In the knowns of our lives in the fields of our lives, in the darkness in the light. In the days when the inns are full and there is only a little corner of town in which to lay our heads. God is with us in the most ordinary places, offering amazing grace and peace. This Christmas, let your familiar be blessed. According to Christmas that's how God works. According to Christmas, it already is.