

St. Columba's Episcopal Church  
Christmas Eve 2021  
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

Two thousand years ago this night a door was closed, and a door was opened. Two thousand years ago this night there was darkness, and there was light.

Mary and Joseph made their way slowly from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a long 85 miles. Mary was near the end of her pregnancy. When they reached the inn at Bethlehem, they found it was full of travelers, men and women who saw Mary and recognized her condition. But no one opened the door of his heart to Mary. No one opened the door of her room to offer Mary the safety and privacy she needed for the birth. So, the door of the inn was closed to the Holy Family. But someone – the innkeeper perhaps – opened another door, the door of a stable.

That night, through the birth of Jesus, God opened a door to us and to our world, a door that had never been opened before, a door that has never been closed since. That night God became one with us in a new way, for that night Emmanuel – “God with us” – was born. In the darkness of the stable in Bethlehem God’s light streamed through the door God had opened with new brightness, a brightness we could see in human form. The Holy Child, radiant with light that illumined Mary and Joseph and everyone gathered around him, the Holy Child Jesus was born. With the birth of Jesus God opened the door of God’s heart to us all the way, exposing God’s light fully to the power of human darkness, from the closed door of the inn in Bethlehem to the cross on Calvary. God has never shut the door against our darkness. God’s light has never ceased to shine.

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus together, with the crèche to contemplate and the hymns we love, we ready ourselves to open our hearts to the Holy Child, so vulnerable and precious. How will we respond tonight? Will we open the doors of our hearts to Christ? How far? Wide open, so the light of Christ will reach every corner? What would happen if we opened the doors of our hearts so wide that Christ’s light and love might reach even the darkest corners? Tonight is a perfect time to open the doors of our hearts to God, to choose God’s light over the darkness of the world.

The Holy Child, the King of Kings, wasn’t born in a royal palace, but in a stable far from his parents’ home, at a time when his people were being oppressed by powerful foreign nations, when life was difficult and uncertain. From his birth to his death, Jesus was vulnerable and dependent on others, as we are. His response was deep compassion for the most vulnerable people, those who were most dependent on others – the poor and hungry, the sick and handicapped, strangers, prisoners, people oppressed, rejected, at the margins. This Holy Child grew to be a man who loved and helped others. When we open our hearts to Christ, we will find ourselves opening our hearts more and more to those who have had doors closed in their faces, to the poor, the lonely and bereaved, to people without homes and families of their own, to the hungry and the sick. And our hearts will move us to love and help others, in compassion.

Two thousand years after the birth of Jesus we live in a world of darkness and of light, a world where doors are shut and where doors are open, a world where hearts are shut and hearts are open. Christ’s light burns brightly tonight, showing up the darkness for what it is. God is inviting us tonight to stop stumbling in the dark when we can walk in the light. God is inviting us tonight to open the doors of our hearts a little wider to the light of Christ. God is inviting us tonight to let the light of Christ shine through us as we reach out to our neighbors in the name of the Holy Child, Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. Amen.