

A Christmas Message  
December 24, 2023  
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

Hope springs eternal in the Holy Child at Mary's breast. That is the miracle that the faithful people of God have gathered here and all around the world to proclaim this day. Hope that God's dream for humanity and for all creation will become reality forever. Hope that we can share and hope that we can be, as God's beloved children.

But first, what do we hope for? The range of people's hopes is tremendous, from the depths of evil to the height of goodness. What is important for us to know is what God hopes for. Truth, justice, peace, compassion, mercy, healing, forgiveness, love. If you and I hope for what God hopes for, then our hope will not be in vain.

Today in scripture and in song we recall the birth of Christ. We remember the long journey of Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem. We see the infant Jesus laid in a manger. We imagine the angels announcing his birth to shepherds, the first witnesses to the Messiah, the Lord. Like Mary, we ponder in our hearts what we've heard about this Holy Child. Like Mary, we have been changed by his birth, and we have been changed by his life forever.

Holy Scripture tells us what kind of man this child became. Jesus was a man of prayer, closely connected with God in every circumstance of his life. Jesus was a man moved by compassion for people who were sick, hungry, and in need of forgiveness. He stretched out his hands to feed, to heal, to forgive. Jesus was a teacher, tireless as all good teachers are to help his people understand the truth, the truth from God. Jesus was a prophet who reminded his hearers of God's hopes for humanity. Like us, the people had heard the message before, but, like us, they needed his voice and his life to make the message real once more. Jesus was a man whose life was given in service to God and to God's people, to the end of his life, even to his death on the cross. But that death was not the end because God raised Christ from death to life. The story we recall today was the beginning, the Resurrection and life in the Risen Christ was and is and forever will be the end that is no end.

From the whole beautiful story of the life of Jesus we who follow him learn what God hopes for. And by the power of the Holy Spirit and in cooperation with the Holy Spirit we can help to make God's hopes reality. In our small ways we can imitate Jesus. We can feed the hungry and tend to people who are ill or afflicted by life's difficulties and tragedies. We can help to heal God's people and God's world. We can forgive and we can love others when it would be easier not to forgive and not to love. We can share the blessings we have been given to help people in need near and far and so, by example, teach others what our faith in Jesus means to us. There is so much we can do to be messengers of God and to give others hope.

Hope springs eternal in the Holy Child at Mary's breast. With all your blessed hopes and with all your heart and with all your soul – come, let us adore Him. Amen.