

On Christmas Eve
Sunday, December 24 morning worship
Rev. Dr. David Thompson

On this the morning of Christmas Eve, we remember that Holy Love stands with us in the midst of our joys and our challenges. However bleak the darkest moments of the year are for us... *In the pain, in the doubt, in the loneliness, in the struggle of right against wrong; somewhere amidst the confusion, there will be Hope, there will be love, there will be God."*

Joseph, in spite of the strongest social taboos, listened to the message of his heart and married an already pregnant woman. Bedouin shepherds left their flocks at night, guided by angels to discover a tiny child in an unlikely place for real Hope to be born.

Wise men travelled an incredible distance, because of signs in their astrological calculations. They followed a star, and were overjoyed to find this child, no matter if he was only the son of a carpenter, because they knew somehow that a child, who would become a King, had been born. Warned in a dream, they avoided King Herod who feared a rival's birth.

A few weeks before Christmas, Reverend Michael Lindval was baptizing Angus McDonnell's grandson. It was a church tradition for the extended family to stand up during the baptismal ritual. They were to answer the question, 'Who stands with this child?' That day the parents and grandparents, as well as many other family members stood up for the child as this was customary.

At the conclusion everybody filed out to go to the reception, ~all except one middle aged woman, Mildred Cory, who was sitting in the front pew. She looked uncertainly at the Pastor and then said: "My daughter Tina has just had a baby, and well,... the baby ought to be baptized, shouldn't it?"

Rev. Michael agreed and suggested that Tina and her husband could call him and discuss the details. Mildred hesitated again and then said; "Tina has no husband...she's really too nervous to come and talk to you. She got pregnant and decided to keep the baby but now she wants it to be baptized in her own church. She has named the baby Jimmy."

This was a first for Pastor Michael, and he thought he better take it up at the next session meeting.

At the meeting, he described what everybody already knew- that Tina was a member of their church and an unwed mother and that he was the only one who didn't know who the father was. **They** all knew who the father was. It was a small town...

Some discussion ensued. The real problem was the unacceptable picture in everybody's head: teenage Tina, little Jimmy in her arms, no father, no family really, only the baby's grandmother Mildred Cory to stand up with the child when

the mandatory liturgical question was asked. Finally, the Session approved the baptism anyway. It was scheduled for the Sunday before Christmas day. The church was full. When the baptism was announced, down the aisle came Tina, all alone, nervously smiling, shaking slightly... holding little Jimmy tightly in her arms. She appeared so very young and vulnerable. It would be a hard life for this pair the pastor thought...

He glanced at Mildred Cory the baby's grandmother, read the opening part of the baptism liturgy and then asked the question "Who stands with this child?" Grandmother Mildred stood slowly to her feet looking from side to side, and then returned the pastor's smile.

Rev. Michael was just about to continue with asking the parent questions, when he became aware of a movement in one of the pews. Angus McDonnell, grandfather of the last child baptized, was getting up and then his wife Minnie stood beside him. Then a couple of other elders stood up. Then the sixth grade Sunday school teacher got to her feet, followed by a new couple in the church and soon before his incredulous eyes the whole church was standing up for Tina and little Jimmy. In that moment, the most precious Christmas gift came to this young Mother and her little baby, ~ and Christmas came to the whole congregation!

Two thousand years ago when the angels and Joseph, shepherds and wise men stood up for an unwed mother and her child, the history of the world was changed.

This same Holy Love still comes to us this Christmas Eve, wrapping its arms around us and telling us once again that we are loved and wanted, ~that we are each other's family, and that within ourselves where our own inner child lives, and in every child we know, we can plant the seeds of a better world.

When we throw our arms around each other, no matter who we are and what our circumstances, when we are courageous enough to support one another in whatever way we can, when we stand up for those who are poor, cold, lonely and unloved, we too are changing the history of the world for the better.

Tonight, in The Christmas Eve service, we will stand with the angels, who still are bringing to birth a promise made so long ago, of "Peace on earth, goodwill towards all human beings."

For the truth is this: there are no illegitimate or unwanted children anywhere: we are all God's children. We are all wanted, and loved by God. That is the meaning of Christmas. God stands up for all his children.

So, when things are at their toughest and the wind blows cold across your life, let's remember that in life and death we are never abandoned by the One born in Bethlehem.

For:

"In the pain, in the doubt, in the loneliness, in the struggle of right against wrong; somewhere amidst the confusion, there will be Hope, there will be Love, there will be God." Amen