

By: Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow

Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow is Vice President of the ABC/NYS Board of Mission.

**God With Us**

“You have seen for yourselves that I spoke to you from heaven.” (Ex. 20:22). The Israelites heard God’s voice, they have seen God’s glory, they witnessed the miracle of their deliverance, and benefitted from the Lord’s protection. They *experienced* Emmanuel, God with us. But still they did not listen to God’s commands.



And we too are witnesses to the miracles and presence of God among us - Emmanuel - and yet we sometimes take them so for granted: the wonders of the earth in the warmth of the summer sunshine, the beauty of new fallen snow, the crispness of the autumn air, and the vibrant green of springtime! To hear the utter joy in a child’s laughter, to feel the salty spray of the ocean’s crest, the glorious display of sunrise as God wakes every morning, and the evening’s praise for a day well spent painted with broad strokes from the majesty’s pallet. Not to mention the peacefulness that comes of praying for those whom we love; even when our prayers are not answered the way we want them to be - there is peace in the praying.

Yet we still cannot keep from sinning, and so we must continually seek God’s mercy and forgiveness; we must continually remind ourselves of God’s love and grace among us and within us.

We have such great capacity for love and care of our neighbor, and it feels so good to be loving and kind. So why is so much division and strife sown among the people of this great nation? My experience is that once we begin resenting people and craving what we don’t have, there is no end to our distress. Forgiveness and mercy are the only remedies. As chains are broken from a

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We have such great capacity for love and care of our neighbor, and it feels so good to be loving and kind. So why is so much division and strife sown among the people of this great nation? My experience is that once we begin resenting people and craving what we don’t have, there is no end to our distress. Forgiveness and mercy are the only remedies. As chains are broken from a

prisoner set free, we need to break the chain of resentment and jealousy that feeds on itself until it becomes hatred and violence.

The child born in Bethlehem - the Christ child - from the moment of his birth, causes fear in the hearts of those who seek to use power for their own selfish gain. The birth of a rival king cannot be tolerated. Especially the birth of one promised to reign with justice and righteousness, to: “scatter the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, to bring down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly; to fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty...” (Luke 1:51-53) This is bold prophecy for a young girl to sing of the child that grows in her womb. It sets the despots’ teeth on edge and get the wheels of evil intent turning in the vengeful mind.

And so even at his inception, before the angels herald the birth of a new born king, *peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled*; before we sing *Joyful all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies, with the angelic host proclaim, Christ is born in Bethlehem....*; even as we welcome his birth rejoicing - others are plotting how to destroy him.

Such is the nature of humankind, is it not? For even at the very beginning humans were contrary to the will of God. Even in the *very first family* God had to remind his children, ‘Sin is crouching at your door, it seeks to devour you, but you must master it.’ (Gen. 4:7)

Unfortunately, both the texts from Luke and the account from Matthew are part of our Christmas story and tradition. While the powerful seek to destroy him through their resentment, jealousy and greed; wise men and women still seek the Truth of Christ’s merciful lovingkindness. For 2000 years they have tried to destroy the Christ, but the Christ child will be born again, and the Spirit of Christmas that lives in the hearts of those who believe in him will never die.

This week, Jesus will once again be born into a world like one that existed 2000 years ago. A world where we forget the miracles of God in a lust for power and the maintenance of the status quo. But time marches on and once again:

*Christ by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord! Late in time behold Him come, offspring of the virgin’s womb: veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate deity, pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel, Hark the herald angels sing Glory to the new born king! Amen*

Image: Adoration of the Shepherds, Jacques Le Breton & Jean Gaudin, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=51557 CC-BY-SA-3.0>

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