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Christmas 2009

All week long I've heard people ask me the same question – “Are you ready for Christmas?” I'm never sure how to respond. Sometimes I think the best response would be an ear splitting scream. What has to happen before one is, as they say, “*ready* for Christmas?”

Certainly there is a lot *not* done. The Christmas cards are not all done – they're going to be late this year. That saddens me as there are some people I wish I had been able to send a letter to.

Certainly the Christmas sermons are not all done – yet... and I'm never happy how they turn out but at this point they are what they are!

And certainly for my own self I do not feel ready – I had hoped that I would have felt more spiritually ready and that I had spend more time preparing over Advent so that I could celebrate this night with a heart that felt ready and more prayerfully prepared.

I somehow feel like I should have had more spiritual training and have my soul in better shape and be in a more saintly frame of mind – and despite the fact that Christmas is now upon us I still growl and grouse when driving around and getting stuck in traffic and being cut off by drivers on cell phones.

However, this is the best I am right now and Christmas is here upon us. But perhaps – probably even - I am not the only one here who is not ready for Christmas either but the Christ child comes to meet us however ready we are.

In the time I did have for reflection though I've been thinking a lot about about Mary and Joseph and how the Christ child came to them – ready or not. We are told by the Christmas story that when Mary should have been at home nesting knitting booties and Joseph building a nursery getting ready for the birth of Jesus they were caught up in someone else's plans – The Roman Government.

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Luke tells us what happened in this way: “Now it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed...and all went to be taxed everyone into their own city.”

We forget in those days just how difficult it was to travel – we who are used to planes and cars have no idea of how dangerous and long a journey was and Mary and Joseph, because of some king who wasn't even one of their own people had commanded that they had to be taxed.

And so late in Mary's pregnancy. They may have hoped for the best that they would be back home in time before the baby was born but in their hearts they must have been sorely afraid that their baby would be born en route.

How full of fear that journey was. They were not ready either for the Christ child to be born.

The town of Bethlehem was full to bursting. People shoved and pushed. The streets would be full of people yelling and calling to each other and peddlers selling things on the corners. Here and there, thieves and pickpockets preyed on the many strangers who were lost in a strange town.

And there was no room in the inn – and no in-laws to stay with no strings they could pull. You can imagine them getting more and more scared – perhaps with the beginnings of labour perhaps as it's nearly dark – perhaps with a sense of desperation – and the truth of the Christmas story is that the Christ child was very nearly born right on the very street.

Some kind soul pitied them and gave them a little place to stay - in a stable – with all the sounds of the animals and their presence – the smells of manure and straw and all the fear and messiness of birth with Joseph scrambling for water and asking for help and is there a midwife somewhere nearby? this is how the son of God was born among us whether we were ready for him or not.

This wondrous story says a lot about the wondrous God we have. God comes to find us as we are and to be one of us.

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God did not demand special treatment as he entered our world – no frills not a palace nor servants and attendants but was born right in the muck of it all on the road. God did not choose the most rich or the powerful - nor did he come for spiritual Olympians – he came to an ordinary scared young couple waiting for their first child.

This tells us that God comes to us wherever we are – even when we are unready and chooses to come along side of us – whether we think we’re ready or not or whether we think we’re worthy or not God thinks we are – and he comes alongside us and makes his dwelling place with us.

God meets us wherever we are and to whoever we are.

This is the meaning of Christmas – we have a God who meets us even in the mire and the muck in the thick of it all he is there – starting in a busy overcrowded little town born to be among us. This is the gift God has for you this year – the gift of being willing to come and meet you where you are to be with you in whatever you are doing and to show his love for you.

The Christ child is born to you now – – asking if he can come with you on your journey wherever the road is taking you- and ready or not – he is here.