

The Work of Christmas

Luke 2:1-20

July 17, 2022 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, UCC

Rev. Dr. Cathryn Turrentine

Our daughter Anna used to manage a Hallmark shop in Massachusetts. Every summer, like most Hallmark stores, they would hold a Christmas in July sale. The employees all wore Santa hats, and they put the air conditioner on full blast, so everyone felt a little wintry. Anna made a crock pot of spiced apple cider. You could smell it the instant you walked in the door. “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” played in an endless loop over the sound system, just as it does in December. Christmas cards and Christmas décor filled the shelves, and the walls were covered with all the new ornaments. It was a fun event for customers and a big money maker for the store. Christmas, right there in the middle of summer.

We celebrate Christmas with all our senses, which is only right. The tangy scent of Christmas trees, and the warm aroma of a turkey in the oven. Tiny twinkly lights to brighten the long night. The familiar words of the Christmas story. The laughter of children. The warm hug of a loved one, come for Christmas dinner. And oh! Those Christmas cookies!

We are believers, for whom the center of the Christmas celebration is the coming of Almighty God to live among us. All the light and power and love of God, coming to walk our dusty streets with us, to laugh with us, to share our sorrows and our meals, to be broken open for us, to conquer death. For us. You might think that would be enough to get our attention, even without ornaments and carols. But we, too, are human, and so we find a path into the wonder of the season through our human senses, and like everyone else, we put away the wonder of the Incarnation when the New Year rolls around.

That’s appropriate, actually. Wonder is an acute emotion. We cannot remain in that heightened state all the time. It would exhaust us. But wonder does its work. Every Christmastide, as we take in the evidence of God’s pure love for us, wonder opens our hearts. And when wonder eventually subsides, the question for us is whether the love we have received at Christmas overflows from us to those who need it most, whether we are ready to be the loving, broken, triumphant Body of Christ.

Theologian Howard Thurman called this the Work of Christmas. He wrote:

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart.

So, it is Christmas in July! Let us sing Silent Night with wonder and awe. Let us tell it on the mountain that Christ has been born. Let us wish one another Merry Christmas with the true love of the season. Let us feel it down to our toes. And then let Joy call us into the world once again. Refreshed and re-filled with God’s pure love, let us roll up our sleeves and be about God’s work, the work that Jesus himself came to do, the holy work to which we are called. This is the work of Christmas.

Amen