

We don't actually know what time of year Jesus was born—May, August or maybe even December. But the time of year we celebrate Jesus' birth makes sense. This is the time of year we experience about eight and a half hours, where as in June there is almost 16 hours of daylight. Something in us craves light. We need it for our health, light lifts our spirits. It is in the darkest part of our year that we celebrate Jesus coming because it is in the darkness that we most need the light. The gospel of John announces Jesus' birth by saying, "the light shines in the darkness."

There is darkness in our lives, more than just the lack of sun light. At Christmas I remember the people that aren't with us—loved that have died or people who aren't able to get back to celebrate with us. Some of us gather here this evening have put on a joyous face to hide a pain, uncertainty or fear we feel. As we look at our communities and world it doesn't matter whether we watch NPR, FoxNews or CNN there is darkness—politically people are yelling at each other Republicans and Democrats in our country, Russia, Turkey, Iran, the United States and many many more around the globe. The United Nations and humanitarian agencies tell of governments that trample the basic rights of their people in favor of furthering their power and power the powerful.

I've heard it many times, but it struck me differently this year, "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria." What struck me was the almost ultimate power of the Roman rulers that Luke names and

the seemingly insignificant events Luke describes next: a pregnant teenager, wandering shepherds. Mary, Joseph and the rest are so small compared to these rulers. Yet the events Luke describes will change the whole world. It's like the chorus from Bruce Cockburn's song "Cry of a Tiny Baby"

*Like a stone on the surface of a still river
Driving the ripples on forever
Redemption rips through the surface of time
In the cry of a tiny babe (1:50-2:18)*

This fall we were hiking with the girls at Elm Creek Park in Maple Grove, as we walked over a bridge one of the girls tossed a rock into the stream and like you would expect, like the picture, there were ripples, but the gentle current pulled the ripples in its direction further and faster.

It is audacious to believe that the birth of a baby in a backwater town could possibly matter yet the event continues to make waves. God continues to show up and show up where we least expect—in darkness—and our world and lives have darkness but, "light shines in the darkness... and the darkness does not over come it." The headlines we read and worry about will have their day and then fade away against the backdrop of this story. God continues to show up and God shows up in the light—in the wonderful and joyous and in the in between, the everyday. Many of us gather this evening feeling particularly blessed and grateful for a good year, for good health, for the love of family and friends. Perhaps most of us come holding both joy and sorrow, hope and fear, in our hearts. We are all, on this night, like the shepherds to whom this good news was first given: we are met right smack in the middle of our lives, honored

by God's attention, greeted with good news, and sent to tell others. Yet we still struggle with what this is all about. Asking, "What do we say?" and "How do we say it?" I think it goes like this (Charlie Brown Christmas video) Love comes to us and love come to our world in the cry of a tiny babe—Jesus.

A few years ago I heard a story about a man. His mother had played piano at their little country church and she tried to teach him to play but he wasn't very good. One day while practicing she said, "the best news in the world is found by playing a simple scale." He had no idea what she meant, but she told him to play an eight note scale (middle-c,d,e,f,g,a,b,c). He asked, "how is that good news." She said, "you need to play it the other way," (c,b,a,g,f,e,d,c-middle). He still didn't get it. She said, "you played it the right way but you needed to add the pauses." "The pauses?" he said. "The pauses on the 1 2 4 6 7 and last note." He was frustrated, how could eight notes with random pauses be the best news in the world. Then he tried and realized the best news she was talking about (Play c-b,ag, fe, d, c) Sing it with me, "Joy to the world, the Lord is Come!"

Love comes to us and love comes to our world in the cry of a tiny babe, God with us, Emmanuel. Jesus, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it. Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Amen!