

Text: Isaiah 9:2-4, 6-7; I John 4; Luke 2

Again to the manger- once more to hear this story of a young man and woman traveling, finding an unlikely shelter- and a birth in a cold winter's night. Any newborn infant is at once a wonder and an astonishment- hold an infant in your arms- and your mind is carried far into the future - even as your attention is laser focused on the smile- eye's opening and trying to focus- the tiny fingers with their perfect creases around the knuckles.

The eternal Word- the self-expression of God begotten from before all time- and the very shape and pattern of creation "through whom all things were made, the creed tells us- the Son of God takes this tiny, weak presence among us. A mother holds him, Joseph stands close at hand. Shepherds crowd in at the door , unexpected and unlikely guests on the scene. An infant.

God comes among us in this way- and then follows the long quiet years of growth and maturing; of learning and playing, working and exploring. And then, the baptism, the years' of teaching and the work - to heal and to gather a group of friends. The death- and that astounding, earth shattering return when he stands once more with his friends to break the bread- to send them out- God comes among us in this way. Not a set of rules to be memorized or explored for loop holes. Not a set of propositions to be argued or debated. But this infant- in the face and hands that were so compelling; in this life strong enough to walk through death- in this infant, whose birth among us sets angels singing- and breaks this world's cold dark night- with carols and brilliant lights- with gifts that reflect that one gift- and with gatherings that point to the reconciliation of all things.

An infant. Remember this- within the mystery of the eternal trinity- there is this moment- when the Word was made flesh and lay in a manger, silent. The depths of eternity- reaching far beyond our understanding- and still an infant- with the promise of a life time to come- and with the weakness that demands our attention and care- a wonder that delights us. However old we are- however tired the world seems at the end of year with more than its share of sorrows- however old the world seems- God is this young- this full of promise and future.

The media will periodically tell the story of some failed rural town- where there are no succeeding generations, and so schools close- and from that, so many other closures follow. A sad and irreversible decline follows the end of childhood's presence.

It is not so in the kingdom of God- the Son of God has taken our mortal flesh- with all its limitations and weaknesses- and with its strength and creativity. Christ takes the beauty and the promise of an infant- and now that- is forever more part of God. We worship a God- we seek to know and serve a God- whose life - whose being encompasses this story- and who has made a home in our midst- as an infant.

We hold an infant in our arms- at least in our prayers tonight- and our thoughts and imaginations are carried into the future- our hearts are stirred to be attentive and to respond with care and an abiding focus. Grace- the free, unearned, goodness of God towards us - gives joy and displaces our fear. And so we respond- paying ever closer attention to the whole Gospel, whose beginning we see tonight. We respond- recognizing that every child- and every person is somehow part of this story- we do not give up on our own lives- this is no one- and no neighborhood- that is not somehow part of this night's promise; and as we have received so much- we learn to give what is ours-

the story is open ended- and the promise is that there is more than enough future- for what we give - and even more to return to us. The world is young- and so it is worth our care and attention- it is worth our hard work to know and do what is right- to build a household, a family, a neighborhood where this child- and the least of his kind- might flourish.

Ancient of days- the one who was before all that is- and yet, born among us just these few hours ago. Christ is born- and the world's future is no longer weighed down with the past's burdens- there is a future- a hope- and a new beginning today- and every day- and in the last and unending day. Christ is born- and the whole world- and each of us- is given a future. Receive what is given with joy- give what you can, knowing that joy abounds in every act of giving- and turn past this night- and this festival towards whatever the new year will bring- confident in faith, joyful in hope, and strong in the love that is poured out on us from God- and in the love that answers that gift- in love towards God- and towards each other.

Sermon by The Revd David C Cobb
Rector of Christ Church, New Haven
Christmas Eve, December 24, 2009 at 4:30pm