

## Message: "Dear God; Dear John" - Christmas Eve 2022

### Scripture Lesson: Luke 2:1-14, 15-20

<sup>2</sup>In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" <sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

I did something rather strange this year - I wrote a letter to God. I had so much to say, so many things on my mind, that I thought it was a good idea; and I'd like to share with you this evening.

Dear God,

Merry Christmas! I pray that this letter finds you well, and that you are looking forward to this holiday season. My family and I are good; everyone's married and working and doing well -- we've got two grandchildren now, who are amazingly wonderful and still the brightest, funniest, smartest, cutest people on

the face of the earth - and no, I am not biased. We're happy and healthy and very glad for that; please let it stay that way!

For this Christmas, I created a list for you, out of my concern for the world. I would like to ask for the following:

1. It's too cold! I ask for warmer days than what we are presently experiencing; I think the general consensus amongst all of us is that sixteen degrees below zero is not helpful!
2. Help us move more rapidly away from fossil fuels; we know how; give us the will.
3. It's too cold! Please have the sun do some overtime for us.
4. Please end the war in Ukraine; there is enough bloodshed already from this senseless violence.
5. It's too cold! Ice is everywhere, and the snow isn't melting much; how about a warm wind from the south?
6. Move our country beyond the terrible polarization that confuses our political environment;
7. It's too cold; my car is complaining, my coat is getting worn out, and I have holes in my wool socks; what about a Missoula inversion that traps warm air?
8. Those people I keep lifting up in my prayers who don't seem to think right? Please correct their thinking.
9. It's too cold! My body has come up with new aches and pains due to the cold, and no, it is not because I'm getting older! Some warmth, please.
10. Our homeless situation in Missoula is very bad and getting worse; I ask for affordable housing for all.
11. It's too cold! How about some good legislation for a change, outlawing temperatures below, say, 20 degrees?
12. I ask that you stop the spread of hatred around the world; there is too much exclusion and prejudice driving things; move us more towards an appreciation for differences and a valuing of every human being as worthy of respect and love.
13. Did I mention that it's too cold?

I hope you'll see the reasonableness of my requests; indeed, I believe that you receive much of the same sort of prayerful correspondence from many if not most

people of faith. I have great confidence in your response and thank you for your attention to these requests.

With pastoral affection, I am sincerely yours,

Rev. John Daniels

I mailed this out a few weeks ago, thinking I would get ahead of the Christmas rush. And wouldn't you know it? My letter got there! I know this because yesterday I received a letter from God responding to mine. A letter from God - now, wouldn't that be interesting?

Dear John,

It's always good to hear from you, and especially in the manner of a formal letter - I don't get many of those. I am also glad you and your family are well. The issues you highlight are of great importance to me; I am with you in that (except, perhaps, for your issues with the cold? You haven't noticed the fresh air, the beautiful stillness, the vital moisture, and the catalyst for renewal that can only come with frigid temperatures? Do you really want to lose those?).

As you know, wherever there is injustice, suffering, pain, destruction, poverty, .....I am there. But I must remind you that I am a collaborative God, a God who does things by means of relationship; that means you and me together. There is no place for a person of faith to live on the sidelines as an interested observer; I require involvement. This goes for any who claim my name; it is my invitation to the world to work together for the things that matter. I tire so much of the prayers that go nowhere. Oh, I hear them, but without the words leading to investment of self along the lines of what is prayed for, the words of prayer hang in the air like Christmas ornaments upon a tree - beautiful in themselves but soon put away and forgotten. When I came amongst you on earth, it was for no mere ornamental function; it was to instill in you all a hope you could not grasp on your own, a life you could not manage on your own, and a love you could not produce on your own. Jesus was my conduit for grace; the incarnation

was my clarity to your confusion; as I was with you in Jesus, I am with you in Christ; I have always been, and always shall be, a God who will be with you -- if you let me.

If you wish to see me, look for the things I came to change; if you wish to feel my presence, approach me with a longing heart and open mind; if you wish to know me, know what I desire most and become involved. Celebrate the birth of Jesus in the many ways that you do, but know that real celebration cannot be limited to one day out of the year. The celebration I crave, and the celebration that serves your lives, is a daily life guided by what I have done, am doing now, and will continue to do, in my connection with the world. Remember, I am a stubborn God, and will not rest until I see your life remade, and the world transformed.

Please give my love to your family and your congregation.

With Divine attention and love,  
God