

God Does the Unexpected
Christmas Eve Meditation 2011
Hampton Baptist Church – Rev. Chris Kurtz

God in a dirty, smelly stable!

In our eyes, God is always doing unexpected things; not because it is God who is hooked on novelty, but because God's kind of love is extremely rare in our love-deprived world. If we lived back then we would not have anticipated Christmas. We wouldn't have expected that God would fulfil generations of prophecy and perform the most profound and extraordinary event in the whole of history of life on this planet by sending the long awaited Messiah in this way. We certainly would not expect this event to take place in a stable in the out of the way, obscure town of Bethlehem.

Nor would we have expected that God's special thing would take place in the vulnerability of yet another tiny baby.

Babies are plentiful in our world, thousands are born every day, but God's pure wisdom planned another; one more infant in whom God's true-love could be born among us full of unimaginable hope and grace.

Tonight we celebrate the coming of God in human flesh to walk with and among us. Tonight our potential strengths are uncovered and our weaknesses are overcome. Tonight our self-respect is recreated by this common yet unique baby. Tonight our faith is renewed as the unexpected God does this unexpected thing by which the whole world is in a profound sense reborn through one more baby. With this birth, the world would never be the same again; never the same valley of broken hopes, never the same barren field of loneliness. Never the same stony hilltops where despairing souls build altars to an unknown God.

Tonight we once more celebrate that God chose to be revealed to the world through the uncertain obedience of a teenage, unwed couple. God does the unexpected through Mary and Joseph and true-love comes to earth in flesh and blood in the same way each of us entered the world. The very soul of God wears our flesh and shares our laughter, bears our smell and shares our toil, shares our dreams and our frustration and heartache.

With the resilience of Divine grace, with the light which cannot be put out, with the joy which no one can take from us, God comes among us gasping a first breath and crying out in protest at the apparent coldness of existence. It

is all so strangely and wonder-fully odd, yet so wonder-fully right for God to do this great thing for a dark and sinful world. It is a strange and unexpected way for God to save the world, through this baby.

That is why we come together tonight in anticipation; that the unexpected God may meet us again in our common experience. We come together tonight to celebrate Emmanuel, God with us. We come tonight to renew our relationship with the unexpected God that so loved the world and so loves each one of us that the most wonderful, perfect, unexpected and indescribable gift was given. May we lift our hearts and rejoice that it is true.

O come, o come, Immanuel!

Indeed, O God, we believe in the one born in Bethlehem this night - and we give you thanks for all the gifts that you have given us through him. We praise you for his birth, for how he lived his life as your servant and for how, in obedience and in love he finally gave himself over to death, even death on a cross, for our sakes -

thereby opening to all people the gates of heaven and the way to eternal life. O God we spread this table before you as he commanded us to do on the night he was betrayed. We remember how he took bread, and gave you thanks for it - as even now we give you thanks O God for our daily bread - and how he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, "take, eat, this is my body, broken for you.". In like manner we recall, how when the meal was done, Jesus took the cup, the cup of blessing, and after giving thanks, offered it to his disciples saying, "take, drink, this is my blood, the blood of the new covenant for the forgiveness of sins as often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me."

Bless O God, this bread and this wine that it may be for us communion in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. O Lord bless these elements and bless us that we may grow in our faith and live in and through Jesus a faithful and righteous life all our days. We ask all of this through Christ our Lord, as we pray the prayer he taught us. "Our Father...."