



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

December 25, 2011, Christmas Day

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Isaiah 62:6–12

Psalms 97

Titus 3:4–7

Luke 2:(1–7) 8–20

Introduction

Today's texts prompt us to think about the appearing of Christ in connection with righteousness and salvation. Are we aligned with the birth of Jesus that ushers in the reign of God? Evaluating our relationships and disconnections helps us reflect on this theme.

Luke 2:(1–7) 8–20

Luke depicts the poor and Jesus' interactions with them. Luke declares God's vindication of the poor and God's judgment upon the wealthy. Luke prominently displays God's coming in the form of humanity. Tradition has it that Jesus' parents were poor (though it must be admitted that the text does not directly say this). God chooses to identify with this community of poverty.

This narrative has been portrayed in numerous pageants. Each time, it is dressed up in the culture of the community that interprets it. The Mexican *posadas* invite every person to enter into the reality of the poverty of Jesus' community. They do not take the role of spectators. *Posada* participants walk from house to house searching for shelter, meeting with repeated rejection and homelessness, as tradition depicts Joseph and Mary. They return to the experience of "identification with," and it becomes a sacramental experience. A sacrament is an outward sign that mediates, embodies, and reveals the grace of God. God comes as a babe in poverty, and the poor become the sacrament.

This invites us to reflect on how we love God through our love for the poor. Our manger scenes may imply that Joseph and Mary were the only ones who could not find shelter that evening, but many in that time were on the edge of survival, as are many more today. We often see the poor not as individuals but as an aggregate, "the poor," in which the distinctiveness and dignity of individuality is lost. The birth of a child on that evening must have brought out the women of the community, particularly a midwife. The birth of a son came with celebratory traditions. The shepherds were invited to this celebration by the angels. They represented another kind of poor.

In southern California, because of home foreclosures many families have found themselves homeless. Some gather in a makeshift camp on a patch of waste ground, Tent City, with no electricity, plumbing, or drainage. The poor are in community because we wish to keep them contained. Containment means isolated from the rest of us, disconnected.



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Identification stands in direct contrast to disconnection. In many Latino and African cultures, personhood is defined by one's relationship to others. Our identity is given to us by the others to whom we are related—parents, community, nation, and land.ⁱ To give Jesus his identity, God chose Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem, along with those without shelter and the despised shepherds.

The Lukan story is a narrative about the embodiment of God as identity; therefore it is about connections. God is wrapped in “bands of cloth and laid . . . in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (v. 7). This causes us to reflect on our relationships and what informs these ties. Jesus' birth announces the reign of God, a reign of connectedness to those disconnected from us, an idea already present in the corporate culture of Judaism. This interconnectedness grounds the ethical political imperative to love others and the creation. Reconnecting to the disconnected “others”—immigrants, prisoners, peoples of other cultures and sexual orientations—is the sacrament of this season.

ⁱ In many homes of Asian and European descent, people are also defined relationally.