
What's the point of Christmas Eve?
Chapel in the Park United Church
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Wrapping the Keffiyeh

Christmas Eve. A time when we celebrate the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. But in 2024 I grieve. Because Bethlehem was located in Palestine. Jesus was Palestinian. And for the past 14 months the western world - including Canada - has been supporting an apartheid state to commit a genocide in Palestine.

[image: Jesus in a manger]

It's a very disturbing contrast. We all probably have some very idyllic images of Jesus being born in a stable. In a calm and peaceful country. Mary and Joseph were content and comfortable and well-fed. Their biggest problem was that there was no room in the inn so they had to sleep in a barn. That's the image of the nativity that we carry in our heads.



[image: Jesus in the rubble]

But if Jesus was born today, he would be born on a pile of rubble. If Jesus was born today, he would be born to parents who are starving because of a racist and deliberate program to intentionally starve millions of Palestinians to death.



BTW - this image is from the Nativity Scene in a church. It's from 2023 from the Lutheran Church in Bethlehem.

I won't give a long history lesson now, don't worry. But in very brief summary, we - today - have to make a decision. Do we want to live in a world where "might makes right"? Or do we want to live in a world where human rights

and justice actually matter? Do we want to live in a world where human beings - you know, God's children - actually matter. In democratic terms, do we believe in the rule of law? Or do we think that people with money and power should be able to act with impunity? Even if it means slaughtering millions of people?

And in a strange way, that question brings Christmas into the here and now. Jesus - 2000 years ago - was born into a Roman occupation and oppression. Jesus - today - is born into an Israeli occupation and oppression.

[image: peace]

The fight about power versus justice is an old and ongoing fight. But Jesus invites us to live into a world where human rights and justice actually matter. Jesus invites us to live into a world of peace.

And in spite of being born in a place of oppression and racism himself, Jesus lived his life - and invites us to live our own lives - in a way that trends towards justice.

I want to symbolize this by wrapping our Jesus model in a keffiyeh. The keffiyeh is a fabric pattern adopted by Palestinians.

- The fishnet represents the connections to fishing, and the Mediterranean Sea.
- The bold pattern represents trade routes that went through Palestine, and the long history of commerce, travel, and cultural exchange.
- The olive leaves represent strength, resilience, and perseverance. The olive tree is essentially synonymous with the Palestinian land, spirit, and culture.

[place a keffiyeh on Jesus]

[image: royal wedding]

Christmas Eve only comes once a year. And yet, I feel like I live this evening a few times every year actually. Because Christmas Eve services always remind me of weddings.

There are differences of course. For example, the budget for this little wedding might have been a little bit more than the budget for the service here this evening.

But the main similarity between Christmas eve services and weddings for me is this. Both Christmas eve services and weddings point to something that is vastly more important than the actual services themselves. And we can completely miss that if we are not paying attention. Or if we are over-dosed on egg nog.

Consider weddings. Weddings can be a lot of fun. They can be great opportunities for family and friends to come together to celebrate love. Weddings are usually little bubbles of “perfection”. The perfect dress, the perfect table-centres, the perfect minister of course. And most weddings are accomplished in the space of a day.

I love weddings. But the reality is that weddings are simply not very important when compared with what comes after the wedding. Marriage.

Because marriage is the long-term, slow-burn living life in partnership with another person. Marriage is about the ups and downs, highs and lows of life, making mistakes and creating forgiveness in our midst. Marriage is about living in actual imperfect reality in ways that include love, joy, fear, pain, sorrow, grief, and everything else we call “the human condition”.

Weddings are great, but marriage is much more important. And you could attend 100 weddings and learn nothing at all about marriage.

[image: magi]

Consider Christmas Eve services. Christmas Eve services can be a lot of fun. They can be great opportunities for family and friends to come together to sing and to celebrate love.

I love Christmas Eve services. But at the same time, Christmas Eve services are simply not very important when compared to what comes after the service. A little thing called normal life. And faith. Because faith is about how we live our lives. How we become better human beings. How we live, cope, and thrive with the ups and downs of life, while making mistakes and creating forgiveness in our midst. How we live in community with others in actual imperfect reality that includes love, joy, fear, pain, sorrow, grief, and everything else we call “the human condition”.

The irony is that we talk about those important aspects of life and faith, healing and hope 51 weeks a year in this church. But tonight, we don't do any of that. Tonight we

celebrate - in ritualized form - the mythological stories of the birth of Jesus. And I hope we all enjoy it. But the reality is that you could attend 100 Christmas Eve services and learn nothing important about the Christian faith.

I like singing Christmas carols as much as the next person, but the essence of Christian faith is not just believing in a bunch of impossible things. The essence of faith is about healing and wholeness. Both for us as individuals and for us as a community. The point of faith is how we deal with real life.

It does not matter whether or not we believe these stories we are reading and singing tonight of shepherds, magi, angels, and all the rest of it. What matters is how we treat each other - and how we treat ourselves - the rest of the year.

So tonight, sing your lungs out and enjoy the beauty of the season and the heart-warming rituals. But please come back on normal Sundays when we discuss how to bring love into the world in the here and now. And how to bring love into our own hearts.

Merry Christmas. And blessings on you and your families in the coming year.
Amen.