

## How to bring Christmas into the rest of the year?

Sisters and brothers,  
I loved this Christmas!  
I loved the services, the time spent in community, the time with friends and family, I loved the days spent differently from all the other days of the year.  
And back in the middle of everyday life, I wonder if there are some lessons for my life through Christmas? Or: How can I transform my everyday life, so that I might bring Christmas into the rest of the year?  
What was so special about Christmas that I want to carry it over into this new year?  
Which thoughts and experiences do I want to hold fast to?

In the days of Christmas – and I actually mean more than 24, 25 & 26 December – I mean the time all the way through to Epiphany... - in those days there was so much space for new beginnings, space for welcoming, space for healing, space for transformation – for and within myself, and for and within others.  
How can I hold fast to these?

There was so much sacred community space over Christmas: sacred space in my individual life and sacred space shared with others:  
wonderful meals,  
a warm atmosphere,  
walks in the woods,  
seeing friends,  
relaxing and sharing,  
visiting,  
just being and not so much doing...  
playing with children,  
holding a newborn baby without looking at the clock,  
listening to soothing music,  
joyful noises and healthy silence.  
It all felt so balanced, so right, so much in place...  
How can I create such spaces for myself and also offer and open them to others when life, with its daily demands, knocks at my door again?  
How can I transport Christmas into the busyness of my life throughout the year?

There was so much nurturing and feasting, so much time in the kitchen, so much serving each other and sharing with each other. Good food and community should be a human right for every individual in this world... So, how can I bring this part of Christmas into the rest of the year?

In theological terms there was so much time to open myself to the divine, to reflect on the birth of the wondrous child, to discover my desire to help God being born...  
There was the decision to not so much work with the Christmas story, but rather let the stories work in me.  
What worked in me when Mary spoke with the angel? How did her courage to say Yes touch and transform me?

How can the ordinariness of the stable and the manger - and God in all that – influence my approach to life, my lifestyle, and the lives and lifestyles of others?

And what about Joseph, listening to angels and following dreams?

The Christmas stories change us. Every time we read or reflect on them.

They shape us.

They touch our hearts and minds.

How can I transport Mary's Yes and Joseph's dreams into the months ahead?

How can I continue the hospitality learned by the Christmas stories and practised in these special days?

There was so much welcome...

Mary welcomes Jesus in her womb, giving birth to God.

Joseph gives refuge to Mary, although he'd thought "to put her away quietly."

The innkeeper with no room makes room...

The strange land to which they flee takes Mary and Joseph and the little child in and gives them a home...

And later, much later, it is Jesus who welcomes disciples, women, outcasts, children, strangers, tax collectors, Roman soldiers...

At Christmas welcoming the stranger, the outcast, the children and welcoming the holy all seem to blend into each other.

So, how will I manage to preserve the life of welcome?

And how can I find the support to be able to be welcoming to others... and by doing so welcoming the holy?

How do I translate the vulnerability of the Christmas God into my life? Into our lives?

How do we embrace the weakness of Christmas?

How do we accept and welcome our vulnerabilities, our brokenness and our need for healing?

Is the helpless baby God, there in the manger, teaching me to allow myself to ask for help when needed?

Is this baby God helping me to tend to the imperfections of life, of human suffering, of hardship?

Is this baby God teaching me empathy, compassion and mercy for myself and others?

...teaching me to smile upon the world with favour so that light can break in and end our darkneses?

This year I long to hold onto Christmas longer than I did in other years.

I would like to discover what happens when I allow the Christmas thoughts entry into the new year.

Here is the Christmas story... a story of vulnerability, of a God who comes close, who walks the way of becoming human from the very beginning... the story of a brave mother who gives birth to the holy, and of a father who sticks with his family against all doubts...

The God of the Christmas people wants to dwell in me too. ...wants to be born in my ordinary life... wants to surprise me and to use me.

In a way we all are invited to be pregnant with God at all times of the year...

carry the burden of insecurity and fear, of loss and suffering, of pain...  
until wisdom is born within us.

How would my life change if I repeated Mary's Yes to bring God into the world – not only in Advent and Christmas but on a daily basis? 365 days a year...  
How can I rescue Christmas into the new year?

We all have work to do.

We build, we clean, we garden, we plant and maintain and harvest, we discuss, we decide, we plan. We all have our part so that everyday life functions.

We welcome guests, we serve meals, we care for things and people.

We work and we pray.

And the exciting question is, how can we work so that the special and holy of Christmas becomes part of our whole lives throughout the year?

Can we see the work we do as divine service? ...as loving others, and growing in love for God?

St Benedict, the famous monk, suggests that we love others by the work we do for them. It may be dreary, boring, frustrating, or it may be joyful and heart warming, but all work, he writes, all work is designed to be a way of care, compassion and service for others. Do we do the things we do, because we love?

We may not love the work of cleaning, organizing, writing or looking after a child, but when we can do this work for the sake of loving others, then it becomes holy.

Our work, our simple everyday jobs are sanctified in the light of Christmas, and made valuable and of worth – no matter what economists might say.

The work of a parent changing a diaper is work done for love.

And the work many of us often value least, service work, is valuable because it is done for others.

Christmas calls us to see the world through the eyes of the holy one who came as a child... who reminds us of the presence and purpose of God in our work... in all the big and small things we do.

God invites us to be aware of ourselves and others in the light of Christmas.

That means: ...whatever we do... it might have God in it.

I wonder if I could hold fast to the Christmas thought of my life and work as compassion for and awareness of others, because it has God in it?

At the very heart of the Christmas story lies the quest to make room.  
Room for God.

...not so much by doing but by being.

Maybe this is the first lesson of Christmas to be taken into the ordinary days of the year?

...that with all my work and life I want to make room for God.

The God of Christmas and the God of creation needs people who let him in, who care for and serve him... people who say Yes and listen to angels and follow their dreams.

God needs people who have a dream.

I always treasured the little poem:  
Hold fast to dreams  
for if dreams die  
life is a broken winged bird  
that cannot fly

I have dreams, and I hold fast to them, mostly because I have learned to see God as someone who too has a dream.

God has a dream for the world God has made, for every woman, every man, and child who ever has and ever will walk upon the face of the earth. God has a dream for you and a dream for me.

God has a dream for us here at Peace Church, for all the churches, for all the peoples of the earth, for the entire creation.

Life is meant to be lived in harmony with God's dream and vision for life and creation. And in the light of Christmas every little thing we do has a bit of God in it, as long as we don't let our dream go... nor let God's dream fade...

If we believe what we sing: "Love came down at Christmas..." we hold the most significant bit of God's dream already in our hands. Let the lines touch your hearts and inspire your thinking...

In the beginning, middle and end, it's all about love.

God is love, and God created in order to share more love, to spread the love around in ever bigger circles, to shape and fill the whole creation with it.

God welcomes us to be creatures made in the image of our creator, human beings who share in the loving, liberating and life-giving way of the God who made us, and who came to us surprisingly small at Christmas.

God created and then came among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to show us the way to be reconciled and right with God and with each other and with everything God has made.

None left out.

None shut out as enemies.

None broken and tossed at the side.

All of us beloved.

All of us reconciled.

That's the dream.

Mary's Yes, Joseph's dream, the ordinariness of the stable, the poverty of the shepherds... all these show us that nobody is on the sidelines when finding Jesus, rejoicing over his life and following him.

If only it would stop here!

But holding fast to God's dream automatically means you're signed up to seek to love and serve in his spirit and in his way.

When the king of the world says in Matthew 25,

“I was hungry and you gave me food... I was a stranger and you welcomed me... Just as you did it to one of the least of these... you did it to me”, that matches right up with all we’ve promised when we were baptised or when we became a member of the church.

Faith in Jesus, following him, leads to a new way of being together.  
Jesus came to show us the way.  
He leads us to form a wide and open community,  
a new society, a worldwide human family of God...

Our job is to love God, to love our neighbours of every kind and condition,  
and to love God’s whole creation,  
no exceptions.  
So, bringing Christmas into the rest of the year is:  
to love... and to do all we do with love.  
Amen.

Song: Love came down at Christmas MH 242