

ARTICLE FOR GAZETTE

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It's almost here! The birthday of our holy savior Jesus Christ! I hope you are ready for the big day. By ready I mean I hope you have prepared your heart to move beyond cultural expectations for Christmas into the sacred realm that is bigger than the gifts we get or give, or the holiday decorations and special foods, or the family get together—as big, in fact, as the heart of God. Be careful! Watch... listen..., or you might pass by without noticing. What comes from the heart is not easy to see. It comes in strange ways, like a baby born out in a shed, or angel song floating in the air, or warm light surrounding you.

One of my traditions in the past has been to write a poem for Christmas, such as this one.

HOLY BIRTH

*Mary was specially chosen
A girl-woman, honestly pure;
But I, too, have given birth to Jesus.
Long ago the word was planted in me,
When my child-like innocence accepted*

The ethereal angel story unquestioning.

But then, like her, I suffered lonely waiting

Such as only faith sisters know

When they have borne the truth.

The turning away of those you trust.

The impatience of even those who love,

The pregnant silence of the soul.

Until there comes the quickening of life,

Internal touching of the Spirit,

The knowledge of fulfilling prophecy—

The joy of being chosen

To carry for a little while the flame

To set the world on fire—

On fire with love, with purpose,

With newborn holiness, ready,

After being carried to full term.

Born then in lowliness, sparks catch,

In places of rejection and discomfort,

Fanned carefully by hope.

Word becomes flesh,

Springs from this earthen vessel—

The word that warms cold clay.

I know now this very word was here

*From the beginning, only
Waiting for the signal*

*To warm again the hearts grown cold
And solid as stone tablets
Etched with unbroken laws.
The word spoken goes forth in freedom,
The flesh broken is born again,
The burning flame does not consume,

But purifies the afterbirth.*

What this poem says to me is that Christmas is not over in a day or in a single action. It goes on year round as the spirit of Christ works in us to bring us closer to God and God's purposes for us to reach out in love to others. It reminds me of the words of the great religious writer Howard Thurman:

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,*

*To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.*

May your Christmas be blessed this year with the knowledge that God is at work in you through Jesus, Emmanuel, *God with us*, to bring peace and love into the world.