

“Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
before the Lord, for he is coming to judge
the world with righteousness and
the peoples with truth.” AMEN!

“The trees of the forest shall sing
for joy before the Lord.”

That is a line taken from Psalm 96.

What comes to your mind when
you think of Christmas trees?

Is it the one at Rockefeller Center or maybe, Macy's?

Many, when thinking of Christmas trees,
recall going to tree farms and picking out
the perfect tree when we were children.

There was the search for it on cold hillsides;
the memories of arguments
about sizes and shapes.

There was the great struggle to get
the tree tied to the top of the car!

You, and everyone who helped,
came away rather scratched and scraped,

itching from the branches and needles;
everyone's sticky from the sap.

Being a Gen X person,
I always think of the Charlie Brown
Christmas tree when I think
about Christmas trees.

It's puny size and sad looking bare branches.

Two pieces of wood at the bottom
make it stand or shall I say, "slump."

I love the Charlie Brown Christmas tree
because it reminds me of the way God
works miracles in the things we
human beings often think have
little or no value.

The things we easily discard are often
the agents of God's way to catch our attention.

If you close your eyes you can remember
the feel of sap on your skin and
the smell of pine on your clothes.

Memories of the times that are past,
yet still remain in and around us. (Pause)

With all of the unrest in the Middle East,
a tree that I just can't shake from my mind is
the one that sits outside a
Palestinian Christian's bombed out home.

It's branches aren't decorated by
a child's kindergarten craft or
any family heirloom,

but with empty bullet shells
hanging from its branches.

Under this tree there aren't any presents,
just bricks, dirt, and debris.

It's a tree even uglier than the Charlie Brown one.

But outside that ruined apartment home
that tree speaks more than
any I can think of.

What does it say about humanity
that the very region where Jesus was born
remains to be one of the
most desperate and deadly?

This very thought reminds us
how fragile and dangerous it was
for Christ to come into this world.

That God did not enter with guns blazing or
even with lightning bolts striking, but
in the form of a baby on a quiet night.

To a scared young mother and stressed father,
this child came.

They were the chosen
guardians of this Son of God.

The account read is bookended
by royal decrees and a
pondering a mother.

They slowly realized public shame and
unnecessary travel for censuses were
the least of their worries.

Childbirth, no matter what age or
level of wealth,
was life threatening.

And while we often focus on the inhospitality of
the innkeeper and the unnecessary stress
put upon people in poverty
by a far-away emperors,

we do well this year to look and see

the glory of God in providing a return
to the birthplace of Joseph and

Of God providing the ability to be together away
from the gossip of Nazareth.

The journey was hardly easy, but maybe
it was a blessing to need to go
somewhere else to deliver the child.

We often focus on the negatives of a manger
but at least it was safe and warm.

God provided them the safety of a manger.

I'm not sure if we've ever
considered that truth before.

And when the angels announced the good news
to the shepherds tending to their flocks
in the darkened fields,

we often focus on their fear, but even
that is short-lived against the good news
they received.

The bright side, you can say,
that even the generations of consumeristic
Christmas habits and busy party calendars

cannot dilute the power of
God with us.

If it were not for such power and truth,
at the heart of Christmas,
the Spirit would have never survived.

But, the fact is, God enters the rubble of our lives
as a tiny/dependent infant and
that entrance cannot be overcome
by discounted Fridays,
cotton ball snow flakes, and
spiked egg nog.

Even though it's delicious. :-)

No, what brings us out on this night
is the truth that God came down
to dwell among us as a baby,
asking human beings to hold him,
feed him, and treasure him.

All that cannot be overcome
by rushing around trying to put
together the perfect Christmas. (Pause)

God took a poor young woman and
an unprepared man and asked them
to be the caregivers for

the Savior of the world.

God placed them in a stable full of animals,
and made that place,

the birthplace of the Prince of Peace.

God made rough shepherds
messengers of the good news
and ugly trees, even ones decorated
by bullet shells and left outside in
the midst of war,

become visions of God pointing
to the ways this God that enters
the life of our broken world. (Pause)

My prayer is that the lights and ornaments on
your trees are delightful and enchanting and
that there are wonderful things under
your tree that mirror God's love
for each of you, and to know...

those lights and ornaments reveal
the cracks and soreness of our
lives and hearts.

No amount of Christmas paper can hide that truth.

The hurt in us, and the pain in the world,
is significant and real and Christ's coming
doesn't "fix" that in the ways we always
want it to.

The wonderful things of secular Christmas are
but shadows of God's love for you. (2X)

And now, may the "Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace"

come to us this Christmas with signs of hope
that the baby has entered.

For "A light in the darkness," and "Love is born."

AMEN!