Sermon by **Sally Howard** from the virtual Christmas Day Eucharist at All Saints Church, Pasadena at 10:30 a.m. on Friday, December 25, 2020.

**God Loves Us by Becoming Us**

My husband and I became grandparents for the first time last June. In the midst of the COVID pandemic and the enduring bleakness of a polarized country and morally bankrupt leadership, our beautiful tiny girl arrived into the world. Held at her mother’s breast while my son encircled them both in his arms, you could see Naomi rest peacefully, at least part of the time.

Peter and I were transformed. In fact, we were downright giddy, gazing at her picture over and over again. We are still mesmerized by her over Zoom and we do the most ridiculous things you can imagine to get her to smile.

Put simply, we adore her.

Three weeks after her birth, she was hospitalized with an infection. We became keenly aware of her vulnerability, of the pain of being at a distance from our children, and the vulnerability of our own hearts having fallen totally in love with her. Such is the risk of love!

Thankfully, she recovered, and yet my heart is still tender for all the babies born into this world, and their parents, and aunts and uncles, and especially those in poverty and great peril. God help us to work for a world where no baby is born to grief or destruction!

Today on Christmas, we celebrate the birth of the Christ child. We sing a hymn, O come, let us adore him! What is it that can inspire our hearts to adore this child born so long ago? How can the Christ child transform us this day?

Let’s imagine that we could visit this baby, like the shepherds did. We would see him swaddled in the Palestinian way, with bands of cloth around his tiny body, would be enchanted by his soft brown face and hands. His cry like any other newborn child’s would be at just the pitch and timber that grabs us and won’t let us go.

We could see that Jesus had been born into a despised group, a desperately poor family, to an unwed, very young mother. We might worry about their ability to survive. Yet, if we saw Jesus held at Mary’s breast, surrounded by relatives, angels, and strangers who recognize the three as holy, as all families are holy, we might feel assured that this child will indeed thrive.

Our faith tells us that this baby is Emmanuel. God with us. God’s love through which all things came into being, outpouring, fully present in this One. You see, God loves things by becoming them. God loves us by becoming us, appearing in mystery and awe, in the manger.

And furthermore, God isn’t a him.

For a very long time, our God has been seen mainly through the metaphors of male imagery. The church long held that because Jesus was male, only men could be priests. And although the image of a nursing mother as an icon of love is common in art and culture, it has been rarely spoken of in liturgy or preaching. But we are changing that—with the help of our ancestors like Julian of Norwich, and those in our parish like Margaret Sendenquist. We have friends and theologians like Dr. Elizabeth Johnson and Dr. Wil Gafney. Together, are we expanding our experience of God.

Listen to the words of our womanist lectionary by Dr. Gaffney:

*She Who is Wisdom executes righteousness \**

*Wisdom’s womb is full of love and faithfulness, \**

 *slow to anger and overflowing with faithful love.*

Or listen to Julian from the 14th century:

*Jesus Christ that does good against evil is our very mother; we have our being in him where the ground of all motherhood begins.*

*He lays us tenderly to breast and feeds us with himself, full of tenderness, saying,*

*“It is thee that I lovest.”*

God is known and beyond all knowing. None of our metaphors can contain the majesty and grace of our God. God goes beyond all our human categories, including gender binaries. Nor does the icon of a breast feeding mother represent all women, nor in any way contain the full richness of women’s love and power in the world.

The birth of the Christ child announced that God has eliminated the distance between us to risk all that we risk, to suffer being broken and torn, so we would know we are not alone. She births life into the world today and everyday, in each of our lives, promising life in the face of death.

I can tell you of times in my life when I’ve had a glimmering of the kind of love God has for us—I felt that kind of love when my baby sister needed spine surgery, or my own baby had surgery-or when I wished that I could be with my kids when they are worried about their baby. If I could have taken any of their suffering, I would have done it in a heartbeat.

That my friends, is why I adore Jesus, not because God is all powerful but because God’s power is all powerful love and shared vulnerability. God loves vulnerability—and meets ours with tender full breasts. This grace is why I am able at least some of the time, to place my life in God’s hands.

Madeline L’Engle wrote:

*This is no time for a child to be born,*

*With the earth betrayed by war and hate*

*And a comet slashing the sky to warn*

*That time runs out and the sun burns late.*

*That was no time for a child to be born,*

*In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;*

*Honor and truth were trampled by scorn,*

*Yet here did the Savior make his home.*

*When is the time for love to be born?*

*The inn is full on the planet earth,*

*And by a comet the sky is torn*

*Yet Love still takes the risk to be born.*

So come, let us adore the One who adores us.

*Amen*