



*“The people were filled with expectation...”* How has our Christmas feasting, celebrations, memories, and struggles, especially the tragic, frightening fire and winds of California echoing earth’s rebellion, deepened our expectations, our hopes? What, because of

Christmas, do we now anticipate or expect?

Which high mountain, of which Isaiah speaks, are we called to; which fear hinders us to *“cry out at the top of our voice, here,”* in all the feasting, memories, struggles and dreams, *“here is your God...”* “Here,” amid everything and everyone; here amongst all who long for comfort, tender words, freedom from guilt and forgiveness, safety, and protection. “Here” in the desert and wasteland; here in the valleys and mountains, in the rugged land, rough country, and broad valleys. “Here,” as we witness the “flaming fire” spurred by mighty wind: How are we challenged to wonder what we must yet learn, how hearts and minds can change; how, as a faithful people, are we to heed the message of the *“flaming fire” and raging wind?* Here, in the middle of it all, we live, feast, celebrate, remember, and struggle. Here, in all those places and in all those people, is where the glory, wonder and challenge of the Lord is made manifest. Here, on this earth, is where people struggle, hope, weep, laugh and find community.

The Christmas feast, memory, and expectation is this: The Word has become flesh and dwells among us, in every place and time, in every loss and gain, in suffering and tragedy, in the horror of wind and fire.

Everything teaching and inviting new vision, a change of heart, mind, and spirit.

So, like Jesus himself, we have been plunged into the waters, for which so many long and need; those flowing, moving waters, a river winding its way through the world in which together we all live, remember, feast, struggle, and dream. Waters on which is built the House of God! Into those waters, teaming with life, moving and flowing, from the mountains into the valley’s “rugged lands and rough country,” we, all of us and each of us, were plunged, and with its flowing ripples we move through the world to walk with those who long for thirst to be quenched and hope restored; standing with those longing for water to extinguish the fires of the weary, rebelling earth, crying out with desperate flames, teaching us to remember that *“our care for one another and our care for the earth are intimately bound together.”* USCCB, Global Climate Change Background 2019

This is our Christmas memory and expectation where all of creation is gathered together: The stars of the universe, the first beam of light, as the earth itself cradled God, *“with water for labor’s washing, fire for warm illumination, and a blanket for swaddling.”*

The animals from paradise, the poor and simple shepherds with their lambs, and dromedaries from the world, from nation after nation, of every culture, race, and way of life. In that simple stable, from that feeding trough for the animals of God’s creation, the world was made anew, creation began again, and God became one with the wonder and beauty of His handiwork. The world, the earth, the sky and sea and every human being bore, from that holy night to now, in a whole new way, the wonder of God, now flesh of human flesh, light of the universe, soil of the earth, and one with its sacred dancing waters. And again, and still, God saw that it was good. It is all good.

All along the way, again and again, we find a feeding rough table, on the shore, beckoning us to take our place with the many in the river, to eat and drink of the One who was first plunged into its life-giving stream; ourselves to be consumed by God's Christ who hosts the supper on the shore of rivers both flowing and dry. There, on the rugged and smooth banks, "the glory of the Lord is revealed," and we become the one of whom we eat and drink. We are born again, and again! The word of God is made ordinary flesh and blood. Christmas comes to life on the good earth, in the real world. Does this not fill us, and the many in the deserts, wastelands, valleys, mountains, and rugged lands, with expectation? Raising in our hearts, and theirs, a new spirit, renewed hope, and an eagerness to do what is good with "kindness and generous love?" Does it not renew the face of the weary and the abused earth?

Are we not now compelled to gather the people, nourish the hungry, carry the innocent, weak, and lost with the loving care of a simple, poor shepherd? Must we not now give with open hands filled with good things for others? This is the high mountain to which we are invited and upon which we have climbed.

A mountain of hope nurtured at the table—a new kind of manger—on the shore, instilling a flaming fire of service and love, instead of destruction and fear; to "renew the face of the earth," to protect God's creation, to honor it with loving care, kindness, generous love, and mercy. To echo in our heart and spirit, even in the midst of earth's rebellion, the song of St. Francis Assisi, quoted by Pope Francis in LAUDATO SI: "*Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through whom you give sustenance to your creatures. Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste. Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.*"

Then, perhaps, in days not too far away, the song of psalmist will echo through the universe of God's wondrous creation: "*You Have constructed your palace on the waters, you travel on the wings of the wind. You make the winds your messengers and flaming fire your ministers.*" It is Christmas still, the Word of God is becoming flesh—bone of our bone, blood of our blood, "*with kindness and generous love.*"

"WE CAN STILL BE FILLED WITH EXPECTATION!"

