

December 24, 2020  
Christmas Eve  
The Rev. Keri T. Aubert  
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

Pageant Service  
Luke 2:1-20; Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11

If this was a usual Christmas Eve, we would have an early service with pageant and a late service with choir and sermon. This, of course, is a very un-usual Christmas Eve. As a result, we're having a middle service with a little of everything—including some things we've never had before. You might say, it's a *mash-up*.

According to Merriam-Webster, a *mash-up* is “something created by combining elements from two or more sources,” such as “a piece of music created by digitally overlaying an instrumental track with a vocal track from a different recording” or “a movie or video having characters or situations from other sources.”<sup>1</sup> I first learned the word *mash-up* about ten years ago, when my family watched the then-new television series *Glee*. It's about a high-school show choir, and the characters regularly perform mash-ups of popular songs. Apparently another name for the practice of mashing up songs is *song blending*.

This week I learned that there are also literary mash-ups. According to an article in *The New York Times*, a federal appeals court ruled that “An unauthorized mash-up of the ‘Star Trek’ and Dr. Seuss universes, a book titled *Oh, the Places You'll Boldly Go!*, is not protected from a copyright infringement claim.” The authors got in trouble because the book “replicated broad swaths of the Dr. Seuss original, including small details of the illustrations.” The lawsuit was filed after the launch of a Kickstarter campaign to fund the book, which was never published.<sup>2</sup>

It's fortunate that the Bible is in the public domain, because Christians have been creating *Christmas* mash-ups for a very long time. Here's how: only the Gospel of Luke has shepherds, and only the Gospel of Matthew has wise men—and still every Christmas we mash up shepherds and wise men. For evidence, see almost any nativity scene that includes more people than Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

I usually like to keep the Gospel boundaries clear. But this year, after looking at all the crèche photos y'all sent in, I started thinking: what if each story *needs* the other? What if neither story would have survived if it had been the *only* story? With that in mind for this un-usual Christmas, let's go with the mash-up, and imagine the shepherds and the wise men as our nativity scenes do, all together there in Bethlehem.

On the surface, the shepherds and the wise men would seem to have little in common: the shepherds are low even among the lowly, while the wise men are relatively privileged; the shepherds are culturally at home, while the wise men are strangers in a foreign land. What holds them together is this: they all took a mysterious journey to Bethlehem, to find a newborn baby. And this: they all brought the same most important gift, their very self.



“Yes,” Dr. Miriam solemnly intoned. “Do you want one?”

“Yes!” Jakki replied.

Dr. Miriam administered the “shot,” and Jakki said to her, “I feel better already.” And she did. Jakki says that shot did more for her than communion that day.

I think that shot had lingering effects. Earlier this week I joked with Catherine that it’s probably why Jakki hasn’t gotten COVID-19 despite frequent exposure at work. I was joking, but later I began to wonder . . . maybe the exchanges we have and the experiences we share are in fact varieties of *inoculation*. They build up our spiritual immune systems, fortifying us from within, protecting us when we are most vulnerable.

This un-usual Christmas Eve, this un-usual holiday season, this un-usual year, especially mindful of our own bodily vulnerability, we need all the protection we can get. That makes it an especially important time to remember that we *are* people of the manger. And here’s the thing: we came seeking, and, together, we actually *found*: we *found* the One who manifests the promise of the Word made flesh; we *found God with us*, and therefore *God in us*; we *found* God loving the world by inhabiting the world, using a body that is as vulnerable as ours, and thereby teaching us to love.

For our churchly mash-up, we don’t have to worry about copyright infringement. We get to take what we inherited, sit around the campfire together, and create our own blended song. Of course, it’s really simply a culturally appropriate riff on a much older song, one first hummed by shepherds and wise men. This Christmas and beyond, remember the manger, and remember those who gather there. Try to keep singing, to yourself and for others: God is born in Bethlehem.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “mash-up,” *Merriam-Webster* online, available at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mash-up> (accessed December 24, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Victor, “‘Star Trek’ and Dr. Seuss Mash-Up Not Protected, Court Rules,” *The New York Times*, December 21, 2020, available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/21/business/dr-seuss-star-trek-comicmix.html> (accessed December 24, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Photo by Catherine Stricklan. Used by permission.