

**December 24, 2022**  
**Christmas Eve (Christmas Pageant)**  
**The Rev. Keri T. Aubert**  
**St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT**

Because the Christmas pageant always speaks for itself, I will offer very brief comments this evening. Mostly, I want to talk about love.

If you're a regular here, that probably won't surprise you. After all, really, when it comes down to it, every word preached here is about love.

But if you're a visitor, well, you might be feeling a little skeptical about that statement. If you came despite feeling reluctance or anxiety, or if you're wondering what terrible thing I will say, I completely get it. The truth is, I react very similarly when I walk into a church I don't know.

These days, a lot of people hear the word *Christianity* and think *hypocrisy*, or they hear the word *Christian* and think *hater*. That reaction is perfectly understandable, considering the Christianity and Christian you find in the news. But there are other kinds of Christianity, and other kinds of Christian. Some of us others have chosen to throw our lots in here, but we're everywhere, even if we often travel incognito.

Christians like us are less concerned about judgment and more concerned about love—love given and received with arms and hearts open wide. To be perfectly honest, I must admit that such love often remains aspirational for us. We try, and sometimes we get it right, but other times we get it very wrong. Sometimes, when some of us get it wrong, others of us get hurt. But we learn and listen. We try to do better. And, despite our own sometimes significant doubts, we keep skin in the Christian game.

We keep skin in the Christian game, and Christmas reminds us why. The gospels tell us that God took up residence on this Earth, living a fully human life from birth to death. In other words, God is not a bearded old white guy living out there in the clouds. God is with us, here, in every breeze and in every breath. Therefore every corner of the world is a temple of holiness; every person in the world is a temple of holiness. Truly, deeply take that in ... and there is no possible appropriate response but to love—to love with reckless abandon.

I'm not saying that any of this is easy. Admittedly, much about the world and our human existence is hard. Even so, God surrounds us with things wonderful and awesome. Imagine the sunrise on the winter solstice. Imagine the hand of an infant reaching out to grasp the finger of a parent. The very purpose of wonder and awe could be exactly to ignite love—love not just as a passive noun, but love also as an active verb.

The two gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus have some irreconcilable differences. For example, only the Gospel of Luke has shepherds while only the Gospel of Matthew has magi. This ought to be a challenge for Christmas pageants around the world, but somehow it works. After all, those shepherds and those magi had an important thing in common: spurred on by unexplainable forces, they all went looking for Jesus. We like to say that love came down at Christmas. Therefore you could say they all went looking for love. And they found it. You just know their lives were never the same.

Maybe we're something like that. No matter how we got here, no matter what we're wearing, some of us are shepherds, and some of us are magi, at least metaphorically speaking. Maybe, tonight, we're all alike and just like them: we're all looking for love.

This Christmas, here or elsewhere, I hope you too catch at least a glimpse of wonder and awe and love. And I hope it ignites love in you, love for yourself, love for your neighbor, love for the world.