

Camille Cook Murray
Christmas Eve 5pm

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Intro to the Pageant

“What is real?” asked the Velveteen Rabbit one day. “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”

“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become real.”

“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don’t mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn’t happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”

Emmanuel, God’s becoming Real, human, with us, the incarnation is hard to understand even to those of us who celebrate the joy of Christmas. Yet the process of God becoming Real – a Savior born of Mary, was about God finally and definitively being able to express divine love to the world.

Christina Rossetti writes:

Love came down at Christmas;
Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Stars and angels gave the sign.

It was the angels who pronounced the arrival of God’s love in the birth of a child. The angel’s words, the grand announcement of the long awaited arrival of the Savior of the world is made to the shepherds. I won’t try to make modern day parallels but shepherds were fairly low on the ladder of status in the ancient world. And yet the angels proclaim to the shepherds, “To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah.” The angels were not just flying passed making some grand announcement for the masses to any who would hear them sing. Rather they delivered a message specifically, to the shepherds TO YOU a savior is born. You specifically. For this is the way God chose to enter the world – specifically and individually as the embodiment of love divine.

On this night, thousands of nights ago, God showed up. God could be nowhere else. Love required God to become Real. Barbara Brown Taylor writes, “It was God-with-us. Not God-up-there somewhere who answers our prayers by lifting us

out of our lives, but the God who comes to us in the midst of them.” To the shepherds watching their flocks by night.

I am not sure anyone really knows how deeply he or she is loved. But Christmas is supposed to help. At Christmas, in the incarnation, God shows up in order to show us eternal love for the world and also specific love for the shepherds, for the wise men, the tax collectors, the disciples, the weary parents, the excited children, the failing, the fearful, the strong, the doubters, the hopeful, the rich, the poor, for you. To you this day is born a Savior – God made real in the person of Jesus Christ. This is God showing up, to you and for you. God’s unexpected love story: love all lovely, love divine.

The thing to remember this Christmas Eve, as you witness the pageant once more, is that this story is for you. God’s love is for you. Christmas is the arrival of that gift, God’s love made Real in the person of Jesus Christ. “To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah.” Thanks be to God and Merry Christmas. Amen.