

“An Inconvenient Christmas... Like Them All”

Luke 2:1–20

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It has been an inconvenient year, to say the least, challenging, unsettling, miserable in many ways. So, it should come as no surprise that our experience of Christmas this year will be inconvenient. Many of us cannot safely be with loved ones and those who can must take all sorts of precautions. If we eat together, it will be with great care and a little anxiety. Most of us won't feel comfortable going to a restaurant a day or two after Christmas, as usual, to get a break not only from cooking but from cleaning! Even the way we are celebrating the sacred truth of this season, especially the way we are celebrating this sacred truth — virtually, not in the same room — is inconvenient!

But we have experienced inconvenient Christmases before. I remember the Christmas we travelled from Richmond, Virginia to Louisville, Kentucky on Christmas Day, with the only options for food being gas station hot dogs and the Velveeta fudge a dear older lady in our church in Richmond had made for us. It was a toss-up which made us feel like tossing up! I remember many Christmases with at least the threat of snow and ice and thus difficult decisions to make, Christmases when Ian and Ali were young and I had to juggle responsibilities as a father and a pastor. And many of us have experienced great tension in trying to balance competing pressures from two families who want our time, especially when grandchildren are involved.

Of course, the very first Christmas was pretty inconvenient too. Mary's pregnancy was not very convenient. Then, she had to travel across the country, probably on foot, while nearly nine months pregnant, because of a Roman census. And when they finally arrived in Bethlehem, they could not find a place to stay — there being no Airbnbs yet — and she ended up giving birth in an animal shed. “Convenient” would be the last word to describe any of these events! And then, consider the ultimate reality to which this story points — the Creator of

the world takes on human form for us — this baby is God in the flesh! That does not sound very convenient for the Holy One.

And yet, God comes anyway, the child is born in inconvenient circumstances. In fact, it almost seems like these circumstances are chosen *because of* their inconvenience. Life is not always convenient. Salvation, which, of course, is what this birth is about, is definitely not convenient. It involves struggle and sacrifice, love and service, a willingness to identify with the suffering and outcast, and ultimately death on a cross. What other way could this story begin?

The Good News in all of this is that just because things feel unsettled for us this year doesn't mean that all is lost in terms of our Christmas experience. It means that conditions are just right for God to enter this world once again in a redemptive way, identifying with our struggles and offering us hope and peace. In truth, we already have experienced such gracious care throughout this challenging year. There is no reason to think we will not experience it now on this sacred eve.

Of course, others around the world, some within our own country, experience more inconvenience than most of us on a regular basis because of poverty and violence, oppression and persecution, natural disasters and human injustice. The Good News we celebrate is for them too, perhaps first and foremost for them. This may not feel like an appropriate time to note this reality, it may not seem to fit in on this warm and fuzzy eve, it may not feel very... convenient. But Christmas comes on God's terms, not ours, and God's love embraces the whole world and all the people in it, especially those who are as vulnerable as the God-child who is lying in that manger.

So, this will be an inconvenient Christmas... like them all... thanks be to God!