

State College Presbyterian Church
 Dr. Charles Curley
 Fourth Sunday in Advent
 December 20, 2009

Isaiah 11:1-19
 Luke 2:8-19

God in a Baby's Hand:
 Absurd
 "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb. . .
 and a little child shall lead them."
 Isaiah 11:6

It's absurd!

"Wolf **dwell** with the lamb?"

Wolf **dine on lamb chops**, is more like it!

"A little child shall lead them?"

It's absurd!

When you think about it, **most** of the Christmas story is absurd.

The phenomenal **natural** phenomenon of a star stretches the imagination.

But this phenomenal **unnatural** phenomenon of an angel choir?

Absurd!

Can't be!

Can it?

The **critical** question would be: "what is the state of our consciousness?"

Are **we** conscious of any realms of reality that we can't touch or taste, or smell?

Well.

There's the world of **emotions**. Can't touch, taste or smell, but it too has its own set of realities, its own rules.

And I suppose, had someone, somehow never **experienced** emotions, any attempt to describe them would sound absurd.

Then there's the world of thought.

Ideas can be a world all their own, with their own rules.

Ask any lover of wisdom -- any philosopher.

Philosophers construct whole realms of thought we never experience in our daily lives.

Those **are** separate realms – both of them beyond the basic senses of seeing, touching, tasting.

So all of us could say we have been at one time or another aware of **more than one realm of consciousness**.

All of them are a part of us. Within us. Extensions of us.

Though we can't taste, touch or smell them.

Let's move one more step.

Have you ever been aware of a reality that is quite beyond us – a reality that doesn't fit in any sense of time and space? A state of consciousness beyond space/time?

Artists speak of such a realm of consciousness; they are quite sure it is more than psychological.

More than emotional.

More than culturally conditioned.

It is hard to describe because we are stuck with time/space words.

But artists – painters, sculptors, composers -- speak of "muses" coming to them from another realm.

Sometimes artists can speak of it in their work.

And sometimes, sometimes the work itself – a painting, a piece of music – sometimes the work itself can transport us into that realm beyond time/space -- into another dimension, which is hidden, **but knowable**.

There are people who seem to know that hidden world better than others.

Sometimes they speak of it as another power.

A force.

A place where their destiny is charted.

Invisible, but perceived.

Hidden, but known.

Does anyone know what I'm struggling to point to?

See, we have some potential shepherds.

There are some other people who are so aware of the hidden world; they would say our space-time world is just one **reflection** of the invisible.

Beyond our time space, is a dimension so powerful it would continue whether we, or anyone, were alive to know.

There are people who seem to live always on the boundary of the hidden and perceptible, on the boundary of the invisible and the knowable.

We call them spiritual. We name them prophets -- holy people who live on the boundary most of the time.

And, at least one time -- some shepherds.

One Christmas night some shepherds lived on the boundary of the seen and unseen.

The hidden realm, Luke called "heaven."

The space/time realm, Luke called "the earth."

And this morning we read in the gospel of one of those times when these two realms are so close together, it is as if we were on the boundary between two different simultaneous realities.

These are moments when even folks like us come suddenly to live at the juncture of the two realities.

When that happens -- we perceive and hear angels.

Just like the shepherds.

For instance, there are moments when we can see the baby Jesus as more than just another baby.

Instead, his beginnings point us to the hidden realm.

He seems to be from there.

When we meet him, it gives us our first glimmer that there might be more to life than we supposed.

That baby might even draw us to glorify the source, the ruler of the hidden realm.

We might, even we might, touch God – touch God in this baby's hand.

As the shepherds did.

And when it happens to us, it isn't something we feel we should do, or must do, it is drawn out of us almost as if emissaries from the hidden realm brought it to us.

Does anyone know what I'm trying to speak of?

Whew, **at least some shepherds do.**

The shepherds perceived the juncture between the hidden realm of God and earth.

They perceived angels.

What they heard was good news.

The hidden realm was going to become more visible -- through a child in a manger.

What had been obscure would become clear.

A name could be given to the reality of this new realm -- a savior who is the Messiah, who is the Lord God.

So the shepherds went -- saw the child and praised God.

Gave glory to the hidden realm.

Luke has done for us what the angel choir did for the shepherds.

Luke is trying to show us the way to the mangers in our lives.

Luke is convinced that it is not absurd at all.

Luke is passionately trying to convince us that we can see the transcendently extraordinary through a natural event.

Sometimes, like the shepherds, in the middle of the night, we are given for whatever reason the gift to perceive the juncture between the hidden and visible realms of our lives.

To come to the manger – to be touched by a child who belongs to both realms.

A child who grows up to bid his disciples to live on the boundary.

Luke has given us marvelous directions for preparation.

Preparation because the shepherds aren't the whole story.

The shepherds go away.

They are important. They praise God.

At least there is someone on earth responding to the hidden realm's Good News.

But then they go away.

Luke allows us to celebrate the times and people who have seen the juncture between the two realms.

To celebrate the times we perceive another world behind the manger.

But the shepherds will return to the hills of their lives. Never to be heard from again.

If you **haven't** seen the opening boundary, which the shepherds saw, then it may be enough to praise God during this time of Advent preparation.

But something more is needed.

Maybe opening yourself to the possibility of God reaching across every boundary to touch you in a baby's hand would be a good preparation before we come to the birth of this child.

It is absurd!

But no less real for that.

God bridges the boundary between heaven and earth to find a place in our hearts.

It is absurd that God would do such a thing.

But God does, over and over again.

Until we see beyond the absurd, accept beyond the ordinary, and open our hearts.

Until we too can sing:

Then, in the streets, we heard the word
which seemed, for all the world, absurd:
that those who could no gifts afford
were entertaining Christ the Lord.

And so, distinct from all we'd planned,
among the poorest of the land,
we did what few might understand:
we touched God in a baby's hand.

(John Bell, Iona)

Amen.