

# Embracing Fragility

*Sermons for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany,*



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## Advent IV: Fragility



*At your command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home. This is my second favorite line of Eucharistic Prayer C, the prayer we've been using during Advent at our 10:30 ser-*

vice. Not because of the references to space, galaxies, and suns, though I'll concede that the phrase 'vast expanse of interstellar space' should be a favorite of mine, a Jedi in clerical wear as I am. However, that phrase really does nothing for me. The real gem lies towards the end: "this fragile earth, our island home." It's a phrase filled with both beauty and tragedy. For me, it captures so much of the human experience shared by everybody who has ever gazed upon the paralyzing beauty of a sunset while also knowing intimately the pains and tragedies that come with being human. Life on planet Earth can be beautiful, so unbelievably, unspeakably beautiful, but it can also turn on a dime and become pitifully, woefully broken. This fragile earth, our island home. This fragile earth, this fragile life, this fragile body, these fragile bones.

This interplay, this dance between strength and fragility...it's been here all along. It's been here since the Big Bang, since life emerged from the chaos of creation. And it was there, right there, in that moment when Mary heard the voice of the Archangel Gabriel and knew what role she was to play in salvation history: "*Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.*" With these words, and with the resounding 'Yes' offered by the maiden of Nazareth, the salvation of the world was no longer from on high...it wasn't wrought by violent victories over invading armies. Once Mary was 'overshadowed' by the power of the Most High, once her empty

womb was filled with the Divine Presence, everything changed. For now, in the womb of a woman, a woman who was strong, yes, but still marked by all the fragility of being human...in Mary's womb God became a part of this fragile earth, our island home, in the most vulnerable and risky way.

We think so often about the power of God...about the way God has wielded that power throughout history. Maybe we focus so much on the power of God because we desire, no, we need a God who is indeed mighty, who isn't weak, or impotent, unable to assist us in our times of greatest calamity. But this story, the story of the Son of God becoming human, beginning as simply a small fetus, wriggling within the womb of the Blessed Virgin...this story isn't about wielding power. It's about forsaking power. It's about humility, vulnerability, compassion. And, truth be told, this was a tremendously risky move on the part of God. As a part of this fragile earth, our island home, Mary would have been subject to the same twists and turns that befall us all. She was not immune to sickness, nor to the kinds of purposeless tragedies that often strike us down unexpectedly. To think that any number of horrors could have befallen the Blessed Virgin, thereby putting the entirety of God's plan of salvation at risk...it amazes me that God trusted the precious gift of the Son to such a fragile world as this. Yes, Mary's life, her strength was being given to the Son within her. But, so too was the fragility of her body, and the fragility of her beautiful life lived within the hardships of the world.

This embrace of life's fragility by God is something to marvel at...something to inspire within us an incredible sense of awe. This is not the story of Hercules, a demigod coming into the world in order to wrestle it, to prove his divinity by trials and feats of strength. This story...this is something else. This is the story of a woman, a strong woman, who said 'Yes' to God...gave consent to the Almighty...allowed her womb to nurture and give life to a God who simultaneously became fully human. This is the story of a woman who laid down her life for the world as she was overshadowed by the power of the Most High...her fragile flesh becoming the source of life for God...whose fragile body became the site of the most scandalous and surprising turn in human history...God becoming flesh...a fragile, beautiful little child. This is the story of a God embracing human fragility...coming to understand what it means to depend on someone else.

## Christmas Eve: Rebellion



In the depth of night, we have gathered...gathered together to push back against the darkness...to sing away the shadows...to bathe in the light of that fleshly, fragile, earthy God...the God who saw fit to embrace humility and become one of us. *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who*

*lived in a land of deep darkness--on them light has shined.* The people of Israel and Judah needed those words once before, when the Assyrian armies threatened to grind them into dust. They needed these words of hope to inspire strength to persevere when all seemed lost...when all seemed doomed to destruction.

But tonight, we need these words too, and so we claim them as our own...as our battle cry against the darkness of the world that we encounter day in and day out. *For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* We claim these words from the prophet Isaiah because we know that 2 millennia ago, a poor, wandering Jewish maiden gave birth to someone revolutionary, someone truly revolutionary...in the flesh, in flesh just like yours and mine, arms bound by swaddling clothes, surrounded by lowing cattle and timid sheep...into our world came the God of the universe, and his birth made a new stand against the tyranny of evil and despair. *As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols; but it is the Lord who made the heavens. Oh, the majesty and magnificence of his presence! Oh, the power and the splendor of his sanctuary!* We have gathered in the depth of night to push back against the darkness and sing away the shadows because we know the power of this story, because we know that the birth of Bethlehem's child made a mockery of the power of all false idols, all vicious divinities, and set in motion the unfolding of a new reality.



*For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.* This vision from the prophet Isaiah, proclaimed now in the context of the birth of Jesus, is a powerful reminder that the violence of power-hungry kings like Caesar and empire-craving sycophants like Herod will not have the final word, no matter how boisterous and brazen they may seem. That true power, the power that can save and redeem humanity, isn't found at the end of a sword, but is found in the shrill cry of a newborn baby. It's not found in the tramping boots of warrior-kings, but in the pitter-patter of a toddler's feet. True power isn't found in garments rolled in the blood of enemies, but in the discarded robes of the God-man washing the feet of his disciples.

In a surprising and scandalous twist, the Almighty, the Most High, embraced the fragility and weakness of humanity in order to redeem us from within. Forsaking power and prestige, God became human and dwelt among us, not just to wipe us clean from sin, but to show us that there are better ways to be human...better ways to relate to one another...better ways of living and moving in this world that have nothing to do with power and might, but have everything to do with love, justice, reconciliation, and peace. *He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.*

In the depth of night, we have gathered...gathered together to push back against the darkness...to sing away the shadows...to bathe in the light of that fleshly, fragile, earthy God...the God who saw fit to humble himself and become one of us. As the birth of the Son of God made a new stand against the tyranny of evil and despair, may our festal shouts this evening continue that stand, and may the lives we live after tonight burn brightly with his love and justice. For though the promises of his birth often seem unfulfilled, and the promised end of his return seems far off...though injustice threatens to reign once again, we refuse to bow down to the oppressive darkness. We choose to live as if dawn has already come.

## Christmas Day: *Enfleshment*



*"Christ is born—give praise! Christ comes from heaven—rise up to meet him! Christ is on the earth—be lifted up! 'Sing to The Lord, all the earth!" ...Once again darkness is put to flight, once again light comes into being, once again Egypt is punished by darkness, once again Israel is illumined by the pillar of fire. Let*

*'the people who sit in the darkness' of ignorance see 'the great light' of divine knowledge. 'Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.' The letter gives way, the Spirit gains ground, the shadows disappear, the truth takes their place. Melchisedech finds his fulfillment: the one without mother comes into being without father—motherless first, fatherless next! The laws of nature are shattered; the world above is fully realized. Christ is in command—let us not resist him! 'All nations, clap your hands,' for 'a child has been born for us, and a son given to us, whose rule is upon his shoulder'—for he is the counsel of the Father. Let John cry out, 'Prepare the way of The Lord!' I shall cry out the meaning of this day: the fleshless one is made flesh, the Word becomes material, the invisible is seen, the intangible is touched, the timeless has a beginning, the Son of God becomes Son of Man—Jesus Christ, yesterday and today, the same also for all ages!"*

So begins one of my favorite sermons on the birth of Jesus, preached by Gregory of Nazianzus, a fourth century bishop who captured my imagination even before my time in seminary. His writings are full of the richest of images, and I can't help but get excited when I read them. I imagine what it must have been like to hear this sermon delivered. To have heard St. Gregory shout aloud, 'Christ is born—give praise' and then to crescendo like a symphony into the phrase, 'The fleshless one is made flesh, the Word becomes material, the invisible is seen, the intangible is touched, the timeless has a beginning, the Son of God becomes Son of Man'...to cross the ages

and hear St. Gregory deliver this sermon with my own ears would be an experience incomparable to anything else. On a somewhat related note, do any of you happen to know if someone at LANL is working on time travel? I'm asking for a friend. What fills me with such delight is the way in which it drives home the celebration, the feasting, the absolute joy the Incarnation brings to us. It's filled with the kind of conviction I remember hearing when I played music at a Pentecostal church: "Give praise...Rise Up to meet him...Be lifted up...Rejoice with trembling and joy!"

And is there anything worth praising and rejoicing over more than the meeting of humanity and divinity, two lovers divided for so long but brought to perfect intimacy in the birth of Jesus those years ago? We are here today, as we were just last night, to remember and celebrate the Son of God mingling with human flesh, without confusion yet without separation. This isn't God putting on a human mask. To quote John's Gospel: "*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*" We keep a nearly two-week season of Christmas because this mystery cannot be exhausted in just one night. And so, here we are, acclaiming once again our God made visible, being 'caught up in the love of the God we cannot see.' It's a paradox, surely. The invisible made visible. The unbound God bound up in swaddling clothes. The never-born Son being born of a woman. It's a paradox, but it lies at the heart of humanity's redemption, for the Gospel writer continues in a section we didn't hear this morning: "*From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*"

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The glory, the truth, and the grace of the Father's only son, now not only the Son's but ours as well. Better than anything wrapped in cellophane and under the tree, that's for sure. What is the Son's, having come from the Father, is now ours. We are redeemed, saved, possessed by One greater than any evil, any shortcomings, any failures that we can imagine. We are heirs to all that God has given to the Son, for in the mingling of flesh and divinity, we have received grace upon grace. Think through that for a moment. Not a stranger. Not a slave. Not a distant relative. Not a friend. A beloved child of God. An heir...a co-heir with the Incarnate Son...rightfully laying claim to that glory, truth and grace made flesh and blood in Jesus of

Nazareth.

And yet, there is something that cellophane-wrapped presents have that these lofty ideas don't: they can be seen and touched. Even as I wrote this sermon, even as I am preaching it now, I am fully aware that there is a gulf between the truths of Christmas and our lived realities. It isn't the case that every time I'm frustrated by my son, I remember the grand truth that I am a co-heir with Christ and suddenly enter into a zen-like euphoria. Or worse yet, when I'm not doing my part to build a better world, to speak out for the marginalized, to welcome in the poor and the stranger, I am living in a way that stands against God's hope for humanity living on this side of Jesus' birth. We all have these moments we can point to, when we know that we are not living fully into the potential God has given to us through the birth of the Son. Maybe 'moments' isn't a good word. Maybe your whole life feels far-removed from this grand vision. We can certainly survey the world we live in and see that this hope for humanity hasn't been fully embraced. Yet I still believe that this 2000 year experiment in the transformation of human consciousness matters. And for me, it begins with a confession.

A confession not of my own sinfulness. A confession not of my own brokenness. A confession not of my failures. But rather, a confession of my absolute beauty in the eyes of God, a claiming for myself of what God desires I claim. That I am a child of God. A co-heir with Christ. A man who has received grace upon grace. Subtle shifts begin to happen when I focus less on my failings and more on what God has envisioned I become. And I confess this not just of myself, but of all God's people. Friend and enemy. Stranger and sibling. All people whose flesh has been taken up and given life through the paradoxical mystery of the Incarnation...all people everywhere are beautiful in the eyes of God, recipients of grace upon grace. Though we may not see at all times and everywhere just how wonderful and mighty the Incarnation of the Son truly is, perhaps as we claim for ourselves this 'grace upon grace', and extend the same dignity to those around us, we will begin and continue to make good on what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. *The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.*

The First Sunday after Christmas: *Make it So*



*All around me are familiar faces, worn out places, worn out faces. Bright and early for their daily races, going nowhere, going nowhere. Their tears are filling up their glasses, no expression, no expression. Hide my head, I want to drown my sorrow, no tomorrow, no tomorrow.*

*And I find it kinda funny, I find it kinda sad. The dreams in which I'm dying are the best I've ever had. I find it hard to tell you, I find it hard to take, when people run in circles it's a very very mad world, mad world.*

This song, first made popular by the band Tears for Fears in 1982, has shown up in several popular renditions over the last 30 years. But...why? Why has this song, by a British pop band who reached the height of their fame in the 1980's, has stood the test of time? Because, I think, it's an anthem of a generation. It so perfectly captures the melancholy of the modern world...a world that continues to run in circles, continues to drown its sorrows, continues to wear long faces made longer by the thousand tiny deaths they endure in a seemingly hopeless world. Not to mention the truly hopeless places of the world...where tyrants reign and tragedy rules the day.

Here we are, over 2000 years after the birth of the Messiah, the Dawnbringer, and we are still waiting, longing, pining for the light to pierce the veil of darkness that lingers over the world. We want the promises of Christmas to come true...that the world, and everything in it, might be reconciled, be put to rights...be made whole by the holy one of Israel. This world, this state, this county...they all need a fresh infusion of hope. They need to know that the darkness of the world, the madness of the world, isn't going to have the final word. This world needs to see it...to see this hope become flesh and bone, not just a story told ad nauseam in December. All who have the breath of God in their lungs need the hope of the Incarnation to become so real they can smell it, taste it, feel it deep down in their

bones. And though we may be tired from the Christmas parties, our hands still healing from wrapping the 101 presents we put under the tree, and all we want to do is rest, recuperate, and think about the New Year's Resolutions we will make but not keep...well, I've got news for you, my sisters and brothers. This injection of hope the world so desperately needs...it's up to you to deliver it, for there is no hope but what we make ourselves.

*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God: for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness...the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.* This oracle from Isaiah was an injection of hope to the people of Israel and Judea as they tried to make sense of the world once their period of exile ended. Everything they had was beaten down, busted up, broken beyond repair. Within the ashes of their world...the ashes of their reality...they struggled to discern a path forward. They desperately needed someone to light the beacon and show them the way. Into this hopeless void stepped the prophet. It's as if he said, "Yes, the world is broken. Yes, we've lost something of ourselves. But even in the midst of the brokenness, I will choose to believe that God will do a new thing." In this chapter, and throughout the whole section of chapters 56-66, the tone shifts back and forth between the twin poles of desperation and delight. But the prophet ultimately chooses to speak and act as if the promises of God have already been fulfilled. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. Yes, they may have not seen these promise with their eyes, but the voice of the Prophet enabled them to believe deeply in their hearts that a new and better world was possible.

*I will not keep silent...I will not rest.* This conviction to pray and act until the hope of the Lord was revealed...this was truly something. And to think, this Prophet didn't live to see the birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. But here we are, living on this side of the Incarnation...our lives enriched by the daily visitation of Jesus Christ to our hearts. In this morning's collect, we have asked the Lord for the chance to burn brightly with the light of the Incarnate Word. It's a dangerous prayer, when you get right down to it. We are asking God to take us and mold us...to use us, the feeble and faltering people that we may be...to use us to spread this holy light to the world still

trapped in the darkness of madness. And make no mistake, the light that pierced our souls is indeed holy, and revolutionary, and powerful. Through the receiving of this light, we have received the Spirit of the Son into our hearts. As Paul says, “*So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.*”

The Prophet Isaiah spoke of a world to come, and here we are, celebrating a world that already is...a world into which God came in the flesh and set in motion the grand restoration of all things. Into a world that cried out for release, that still cries out for release...still longs for tangible hope to cling too...Jesus came. To borrow Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of John 1:14, “The word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” This is pure Gospel...pure goodness and Good News. Knowing this, receiving this...are we going to keep silent? Are we going to rest? Or are we going to go out into the world, in our own acts of Incarnation, and show through our lives that the truth of this story matters...that the hope the world so desperately needs to see is dwelling within us?

*And I find it kinda funny, I find it kinda sad. The dreams in which I'm dying are the best I've ever had. I find it hard to tell you, I find it hard to take, when people run in circles it's a very very mad world, mad world. It's a mad world. It's a mad world.* That may indeed be an anthem of a generation. But we are the people who can tell them...who can show them...that it doesn’t have to be so mad anymore. Let hope arise in you, my sisters and brothers, and thus begin to dispel the madness. Lord, let it begin with us.

### The Feast of the Holy Name: *The Unfolding*



*“We are plain quiet folk, and I have no use for adventures. Nasty, disturbing, and uncomfortable things...Sorry! I don't want any adventures, thank you. Not Today. Good morning! But please come to tea -any time you like! Why not tomorrow? Good bye!”*

So says Bilbo Baggins to Gandalf the Gray in ‘The Hobbit’. But, if you know anything about the story, you’ll know that he found himself on an adventure anyway, and he was the better hobbit for it.

Like Bilbo, we may not want to be on an adventure. We may not want the peril that comes with unpredictability...the vast amount of possibilities that comes with living in response to the Divine Presence...but I am delighted to inform you that an adventure you are in, whether you like it or not.

*Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this story that had unfolded, which the Lord has made known to us.* This is from a recent translation of the New Testament by David Bentley Hart, and I find it so much richer than what we heard this morning. No longer just seeing a ‘thing that has taken place’...Hart’s translation renders this event in such a way that you grasp that these Shepherds, once content to tend their sheep by night, have now found themselves caught up in something much larger than themselves...caught up in a story that was unfolded then, and continues to be unfolded even in our own day.

This is a story about the evacuation of power...about the God of the universe coming into the world, being given the name Jesus, which means ‘God saves’...saving us not by might, or force, but by humiliation. This is a story that has in its first chapter the tale of the God of the Universe undergoing the knife of circumcision. Even in his infancy, before his cross and passion, he intimately knew the pain of being human. As St. Paul says, once again turning to Hart’s translation, *“Be of that mind in yourselves that was also in the Anointed One Jesus, who, subsisting in God’s form, did not deem being on equal terms with God a thing to be grasped, but instead emptied himself, taking a slave’s form, coming to be in a likeness of human beings; and, being found as a human being in shape, he reduced himself, becoming obedient all the way to death, and a death by a cross.”*

Whether we want to go on an adventure or not, we have found ourselves in an unfolding story, just as the Shepherds did. And we continue to tell this story every time we seek to ‘be of that mind’ in ourselves...seeking to embrace humility, to reduce ourselves, to let our lives point to the Anointed One, Jesus of Nazareth. We tell this story by living in such a way that people can look to us and see Jesus Christ. And it is indeed up to us to keep the story alive and invite others to join us in this great, grand, unfolding story of mystery and majesty. “It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door,” said our friend Biblo Baggins. “You step onto the road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there’s no knowing where you might be swept off to.” In following this Jesus, we don’t know where we might be



swept off to. But where is the fun in knowing the journey's end, anyhow?

The First Sunday after the Epiphany: The Baptism of Our Lord:  
*Crack the Skye*



It's the First Sunday after the Epiphany, which wasn't actually all that long ago. 12 hours or so, give or take a few. Have you felt anything yet...something inside you, deep down inside of you, changing, trans-

forming...the birth of a new thing in light of the revelation of the Messiah? The Magi surely felt it, when they saw the Messiah in his house, even as he was just a bustling toddler. *We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, but no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, with an alien people clutching their gods.* So the Magi say in T.S. Eliot's famous poem 'Journey of the Magi.' The Gospel tells us the Magi left 'by another road', as if to say they returned home, but they couldn't go back the way they came. Something had to give. And when they returned home, they weren't comfortable with the lives they once lived. They were transformed. And they couldn't look back.

But if meeting the toddler Jesus wasn't enough to change your mind, to open you up to new life in the Messianic Age, perhaps today's celebration will be. In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. In the Christian East, the visit of the Magi isn't the only 'Epiphany' in the life of Jesus. So too is his baptism. For this baptism is not simply a sentimental event, with Jesus dressing up in his best white robe, passed down from some great-great grand cousin, mugging for the camera. This baptism is an event unlike any other.

For the writer of the Gospel of Mark, there seems to be no need to begin with a virgin birth, traveling Magi, and the whole heav-

only host singing Alleluia. He sets the stage by recalling the prophetic words of Isaiah, then throws us right into the thick of it. John the Baptizer, that wildman with a stomach full of locusts and honey, stood on the banks of the River Jordan, shouting at the top of his lungs, imploring the people to make their hearts ready for the arrival of the supremely powerful one. "All I have for you is water, people. But he...he has the Holy Spirit." And immediately following this declaration, Jesus shows up on the scene, full of urgency, ready to be baptized himself. And, like every good Baptist, Jesus becomes fully immersed in the water, his body taken under the surface, taken under the currents of the river, feeling the push and pull of creation. Up from the waters he rose, and as he felt the trickle of water down his face...it happened.

*And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."* And there we have it, my friends. The Epiphany, the Revelation of who this man from Nazareth really is. Not just the son of Mary. Not just a displaced refugee who found his way home. Not just the woodworking cousin of the Wildman. This man...this Jesus...this is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the one who came to redeem and reclaim Israel, the one who came to turn the world upside down, the one who came to usher in a new age, a new world, a new way of being. Here, at his baptism, the heavens were torn open, and it wasn't just the Spirit descending upon Jesus in some individualized moment of identification. This moment, beloved in Christ, signified a divine confrontation with all the forces of darkness, all the forces of evil, all of the unjust and oppressive powers and principalities that thought they were in control.

*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence— as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!* So prayed the prophet Isaiah all those years ago, and here, in this moment, it came to fulfillment. The sky was cracked open, the Spirit descended on Jesus, the beginning of the Messianic Age. And not just in some idealized, theoretical sense. This truly was the beginning of a new epoch in history. The people of Israel longed for another Exodus, and in Jesus of Nazareth, it came to pass. Just as the waters of the Red Sea brought

forth the salvation of Israel during the Exodus, so now the waters of the River Jordan brought forth the salvation of the world in Jesus. Though he may not have been the Messiah they expected, for he wasn't a warrior king, he was indeed the very embodiment of liberation and redemption...of true exodus from that which binds up humanity.

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'* This is Jesus' manifesto as found in the Gospel of Luke, and it is indeed the manifesto of the Messianic Age. Though we may have radically different interpretations of what this means, we can all agree that Jesus wasn't messing around. He wasn't speaking meaningless affirmations wrapped up in feel-good religious language. He understood that this oracle from Isaiah reached fulfillment in his very life and ministry. The author of Mark's Gospel understood something of this too...that the generations of hopes and dreams reached their fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth, and the world simply could not remain the same with him in it.

Yes, all of this happened nearly 2,000 years ago, and we may sit and wonder why the world still languishes in imperfection. But, truth be told, 2000 years is miniscule when we also talk about a nearly 13 billion year evolutionary process. The Messianic Age of Jesus Christ was inaugurated at his baptism, and though we may long for better days than these, we also believe that this Age has yet to reach its maturity. And rather than filling us with sadness, or malaise, or a sense of 'What's the point?', it should fill us with great delight that we...WE...get to be a part of continuing the work of Jesus Christ. We use our giftedness, our creativity, our wholeness and even our brokenness to do our part in furthering the progress of the Messianic Age. It's mind-blowing, absolutely mind-blowing, that we get to play a part in the redemption and salvation of the world. The greatest testimony that any of this matters...that these revelations of Jesus matter...is not how many ministries we have listed in our bulletin, or how many masses are said during the year. The greatest testimony that any of this matters is not how big our budget is, or how prestigious and beautiful our liturgies are. Yes, those things matter, but they don't matter nearly as much as how many people are transformed by their encounters with Jesus, the Anointed One, whether

in here, or on the sidewalks of Central Avenue. Lives changed by Jesus, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the King of All the Ages...that is what truly matters.

The sky was cracked open. The Spirit descended on Jesus. He took his place as king, and ushered in the Messianic Age. So, who is Jesus to you? What place does Jesus of Nazareth occupy in your life? For me, Jesus of Nazareth is the kind of rabble-rouser I can only hope to be, turning over the tables of corruption and mediocrity. He is the Lord of the Universe, come into our world, refusing to let truth go unspoken, refusing to let oppression and injustice smile that pernicious smile of victory. He's the Anointed One, whose birth, baptism, life, death, and resurrection put an end to the tyranny of sin and death. He's the Truth-Teller who went to the cross for his convictions. He's the only King and Sovereign worth our allegiance. And he's the only hope for the world in 2018. Tell all the world, my brothers and sisters...tell all the world, whether neighbors, friends, enemies, and strangers...tell all the world that King Jesus is alive and well, and just like the Magi of old, anyone can leave an encounter with him 'by another road', transformed and renewed. In short, let 2018 be the Year of Evangelism.