



A Christmas Eve Sermon  
Preached by E. Scott Winnette  
December 24, 2018  
Sleep in Heavenly Peace

For what shall I bid? What shall I request of the newly born God-child -- what gift; what gift for me; what gift for you; what holy present for the world? A new Church year is upon us and in seven days the dawn of 2019 rises. What do you need to make the new year wholesome? What do you hope is left under your metaphorical Christmas tree come morning? Do you yearn to love; do you need a new friend, a puppy or a foster child? Are you lethargic; do you need a new vision and goal? Are you weary; do you need more vacation? Are you stressed; do you yearn for calm, for more trust, a greater hope? Tell somebody what you need; it's not too late to order on Amazon.holy.

Some pastors believe their sermons shared inside Christmas Evening's Worship, amidst her carols, and scripture, candles, brass and angelic choirs; should be the most inspirational ever. The Christmas Eve sermon should superlatively shock with social justice satisfaction. And we are reminded the underprivileged baby in the straw is in exile. Mary and Joseph are refugees running from an evil baby-killing Herod. The newborn is vulnerable, God come down vulnerable needing social services, needing some soup kitchens, needing marchers insisting on SNAP, the brown-skinned babe needing anti-racist protectors.

And this child cared for by loving parents and villages of saints grows to say, *"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."* And he grows calling crowds into ministry, *"Come, you that are blessed by God, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave*

*me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”* And he showed how and asked his disciples to mirror his love into the world.

Do you see mirrors on the chancel? We celebrate Christmas’ Holy incarnation, the mysterious indwelling of God within each person. Christ’s divinity and Christ’s humanity are around us and within us, on this night and every night, waiting to be recognized. God’s mission is our mission the respectful honoring of and gratitude for every child of God and all creation.

In yesterday’s children sermon I opened a gift for each child, the best thing God had ever made. Each child’s gift held a mirror reflecting their beloved face. We are mirrors of divinity, images of God. Richard Rohr wrote, “The true and essential work of all religion is to help us recognize and recover the divine image in everything. Our job is to mirror things correctly, deeply, and fully until all beings know who they are.” Yesterday, Carroll Saussy shared Thomas Merton’s experience on a street corner, “There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun...it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts... If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed.”

I believe that’s recognition of goodness is what we need; it’s what the world needs. We need a global recognition system revealing the deep worth of all. But how do we get there, accomplish that holy goal – maybe it starts a verdant vision, a delicate dream.

*’Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house  
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;  
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,  
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;  
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,  
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads...*

We come by verdant visions and delicate dreams as we sleep in heavenly peace like the Christ-child, so tender and mild. As we sleep in heavenly peace, our dream-sending God shows us visions of shalom dancing in our heads. As we sleep in heavenly peace, our bodies calm and heal. As we sleep in heavenly peace, our minds calm and wonder.

Opinion columnist, Faye Flam’s article, *Americans are starved for sleep*, was published this morning. She wrote, “*Americans associate sleep with laziness, but sleep experts say it’s impossible for healthy people to overindulge in sleep. Some people may crave more food than they need, but only people who are physically or mentally ill crave more sleep than necessary. And we humans need a lot.*

*Some people like to say they’ll sleep when they die, but study after study shows that sleeping too little will make you half dead when you’re awake — less able to learn, perform, remember, react quickly or make good decisions.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Faye Flam. *Americans are starved for sleep*. Frederick News Post. December 24, 2018.

Too many crazy Americans believe sleep is an OFF mode. We plug ourselves into wall sockets, switch off fitfully sleeping hoping our batteries are replenished quick so we can get back to striving. But we know better. Sleep is not OFF. Sleep is a different ON. Theologians fear the idea of a God who might sleep. A God in OFF mode. But what did God do that seventh day of creation? I believe the Holy slept deeply dreaming fantastically picturing all of the possibilities of every creature yet born to mirror Holy Love. Maybe, Moses climbing those cliffs encountered a still-small-voice, God asleep whispering of wonder.

For what shall I bid? For what shall I bid of the newly born Christ-child? I ask that I, and you, and the world starting tonight be gifted with deep sabbath rest, a baby-Jesus-nestled-in-strong-loving-arms type of slumber. I bid God's celestial-lullaby-singing-angels conjure calming sleep. And I bid the world awakens with a trust in God that casts out the fears that make greed, a trust in self that banishes the self-scorning that creates violence.

Jesus grew to be a young man who slept in boats. Who slept through storms. And who upon wakening calmed, calmed the storm, calmed the disciples, calmed it all.

*Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright.*

Sleep tight friends and dream a new kinder world into being. Before we sing Silent Night this night, we will enjoy silence and then as you light your neighbor's candle, bid they sleep in peace and dream in love every day all year along. Amen.