This is no time for a child to be born,

With the earth betrayed by war & hate

And a comet slashing the sky to warn

That time runs out & the sun burns late.

That was no time for a child to be born,

In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;

Honor & truth were trampled to scorn—

Yet here did the Savior make His home.

When is the time for love to be born?

The inn is full on the planet earth,

And by a comet the sky is torn—

Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Amen

This poem by Madeleine L’Engle expresses the love God has for us that is so strong as to be willing to take the risk of coming into a world that didn’t seem to have room for God. Not only did God take the risk of coming into a world that wasn’t perfect, but God also took the risk of becoming vulnerable. God chose to become a baby, dependent upon others for His every need. God did this because He loved us.

The challenge and question for us today then is how we will respond to that love. We have an example in the shepherds. In the caste-like society of the New Testament, shepherds in that society weren’t welcome among polite company. In fact, shepherds were considered lower than lepers. The only reason these shepherds were close to the town of Bethlehem was that they were tending animals to be used in sacrifice. So, when the shepherds heard the angels’ invitation to come see what had come to pass, they knew they would be taking a risk to go into town, among reputable folks. But they allowed themselves to be vulnerable – to take the risk and to be led into town to see God in human form. Once in Bethlehem, they told Mary and Joseph what the angels had told them about Jesus, who He was and what His birth meant for the world. Shepherds weren’t supposed to have revelations from God – to share one was to risk ridicule. Yet, once again the shepherds took the risk. Once they’d shared with Mary and Joseph, they left, worshipping God.

We’re blessed in that we aren’t social outcasts as the shepherds were. We don’t take a risk just by going out in polite company. But, when we worship God in our daily lives we do encounter those times when we have to take risks, when we have to allow ourselves to be led some places that might be uncomfortable for us. Perhaps that means allowing ourselves to find Christ in the face of a poor person and then sharing what God has given us with that person. Or perhaps it means swallowing our pride when we’ve had an argument with someone and apologizing, even if it wasn’t our fault. Perhaps it means taking the risk to love someone who doesn’t seem to be a nice person or befriending someone who may not be a friend to us. We risk getting our feelings hurt, but we do this anyway because by loving others we worship God. Perhaps we are led to change the way we do something for the sake of providing hospitality to others. Change often makes us feel vulnerable, but, if it’s done to bring the love of God to others, then it’s worship – it’s an act of love and gratitude to God and love for another human being.

Howard Thurman, an African-American theologian and civil rights leader, writes this:

When the song of the angels is stilled.

When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and the princes are home,

When the shepherds are back with their flock, the work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,

To heal the broken,

To feed the hungry,

To release the prisoner,

To rebuild nations,

To bring peace among brothers,

To make music in the heart.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The work of Christmas began for the shepherds when they left the manger and went out into the world to worship God. The work of Christmas begins for us when we leave this place tonight and go out into the world to worship God. The world is still not perfect. There still are many places and hearts that, on first glance, seem to have no room for God. Yet, all these places and hearts need God. We are called to be vulnerable, to take the risk to allow ourselves to be led wherever the Spirit of God takes us. We’re called to come and worship. We are called to take risks to share the love of God.

1. The Risk of Birth by Madeleine L’Engle [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The Work of Christmas by Howard Thurman, found in Synthesis: A Weekly Resource for Preaching and Worship following the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A. December 2019, [↑](#endnote-ref-2)