

Faith – Love – Hope!

Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches on the soul.  
And sings the tune –without the words,  
And never stops at all...

Emily Dickenson. Writing some hundred and fifty years ago at her desk in Amherst, Massachusetts.

From year to year I grow more fond of this poem. She found words for this thing which comes in a storm and sings peace and strength and sustenance into our ear. A wondrous blend of delicacy and power. Just as the birth of the baby Jesus once inspired kings to journey and now inspires folks from Scarborough and Portland and Brunswick, and Cape Elizabeth and points farther afield, to get into their cars and drive down or up route one to share some moments together in this sacred space.

What we share here in this sacred place are: faith, love and hope.

Farthest on the wall are two wooden sticks, joint together to be a simple cross, an empty Cross which stands for our Faith in the risen Christ. Faith in eternal life, in new beginnings, into a new birth, beyond the physical birth from the womb.

In front of the Cross is the Altar,  
The Altar on which Christ's love is poured out for us; again and again! In a little while we will gather around this Altar and share and take part in Christ's Love for us.

And now let's look at the crèche:  
And this is the focus of tonight, of this Holy night!  
Giving birth to hope can be quite fragile and it happens in the most unlikely places. There was no room in the Inn. Not much comfort for giving birth to a new life.  
And fragile they are, when they are born.  
But this is where it all starts. It starts in those lowly and often hidden places.  
It starts with a small light, growing into a big shining star.  
No room in the Inn, Birthing pains, God's saving Grace becoming Flesh, in that newborn Baby / King. This is our Hope! This is where it all starts; in this Holy Night!

It all begins with the birth of Hope and that brings Joy to the world, to us.

This is what I love about Christmas. Yes, there's a certain degree of chaos. The cat is chasing the spool of ribbon. Our little one is undecorating the Christmas tree, pulling off ornaments – especially the shiny red ones. The mulled cider is knocked over. The house is loud and the phone is ringing with far off friends on the other side. Children are jostling and giggling and working on secret PROJECTS.

The Inn is overflowing! And yet, in the midst of all this mess and noise and disorder, hope is born. It doesn't wait for peace and space and quiet. Indeed those things would make hope obsolete. Hope is what we need where there is NO peace, NO space, NO quiet. Peace, space, and quiet are the fruits of hope.

As the tiny baby Jesus takes his first worldly breaths in the stable, the wonder of it all is made clear. Clear and bright as a Christmas star! Hope is born in the form of a little child.

And an understanding is born in those around Him. The love of a mother, a foster father, the Father. Quiet shepherds and kings. This hope is open to all. To each one of us.

I'd also like to ponder for a moment the wondrous stretching capacity of the stable. The Inn may have been too full, but look what that stable could hold. The holy family, ox and ass, sheep, doves, shepherds, kings, and even for us there seems to be space. People from all walks of life, all different backgrounds sharing one beautiful quality, the ability to recognize that there is no greater gift than the love and hope that this small babe brought into the world.

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Peace; in Faith, Hope and Love, to you on this blessed Christmas eve.