Just the mention of Christmas

when I was young

sent chills up my spine.

And on this night especially,

when milk and cookies

were placed on a special red plate

just for Santa,

I would be so expectant,

I could hardly sleep.

I knew I would awaken to toys,

ones I had asked for

and others that Santa had picked ,

plus new clothes

and other surprises

that always included an orange

in the stocking.

I really didn’t notice

that plenty wasn’t a present

for all people.

I didn’t know

that Santa’s sleigh

didn’t pull up

to all homes.

My childhood experience

of Christmas didn’t stop there

and

transferred

to Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus.

For it didn’t dawn upon me

as a child,

really even as a teen,

that Mary and Joseph

with their cute baby Jesus

weren’t just like my family.

Sure,

the story said Jesus was placed

in a manger,

no room in the inn,

but the crèche we had

was beautiful,

downright gorgeous.

It just never dawned on me

that the Holy Family,

the real Holy Family,

was poor,

in a foreign land,

and escaping persecution.

I didn’t know that Quirinius

was appointed governor

to deal with revolts.

Persecution and revolution

in the name of religion

and politics

was the norm of the day.

Their Christmas was not wondrous,

filled with magic,

extraordinary and plentiful

in its every aspect.

Their Christmas,

the Nativity of our Lord

was a raw, worldly, difficult interruption

when a teenage mother

gave birth,

and a trembling father was full of fear.

Years and maturity

have now taught me

to see the story fully,

to see that this night

is not a kingly invasion of the divine

but the (w)holy incarnation of the divine.

And that,

my beloved,

is what makes all the difference.

It’s what makes me a believer.

Because instead of some pie in the sky

savior

who fell like a star

from the heavens,

our God comes among us,

actually comes among us,

not as a visitor,

but as one of us.

So likewise,

I realize today,

God comes not as one who is privileged

and powerful

and elite

but as the lowly,

because God comes that far.

To find all humanity.

To be one with all.

To declare solidarity

with every one of us.

With all the fears and frustrations

of recent days,

I am thankful,

deeply, deeply thankful

that our Christ,

our Jesus,

is one of us,

one who knows life

as it is

so that he can transform it,

change it

into what God dreams it can be.

Our last few months have been

anything but Joy to the World.

They’ve been down right hard.

Terrorism.

Both home grown and international.

Political hatred and abuse.

Racial conflict.

Violence in the name of God and religion,

ours included.

Destruction and exploitation of people

just because of who they were born to be.

Lying and down right fictitious absurdity

being passed off as the truth.

These all have been our world the last months.

Never in my life

have I heard so many fearful and hateful statements

in the public sphere.

And that is not homiletical hyperbole.

We all arrive to this Christmas Eve,

a little jolted by the world

rather than “joy-ed” to it.

Many of us fear that we have been so bombarded

that we’re numb.

Some are seeking an “enemy

bigger than their apathy.”

(Mumford)

Others ask,

“why the darkness

before the dawn?”

(U2)

If we have ever needed Jesus,

if we have ever needed a real, live God

coming among us,

this is the time.

This is the time when we know

we need help,

we need hope,

we need a new and profound Advent

of holiness among us.

We know we need a transformative

and life-giving birth

in our midst,

in our lives,

if we are to endure

and expand the capacity for growth

and love among us.

It is into this space

of our lives

that the angel’s proclamation

“Fear not”

must be heard yet again.

That tidings of great joy are here.

And in that proclamation,

in the news that Christ is indeed one of us,

we must realize that faith demands

response,

action,

and

active involvement

in the Jesus movement

that began all those years ago in Bethlehem

and continues today here in Atlanta and beyond.

Action is not observation.

It is more than a cute baby.

For this movement,

this life,

this Christmas reality,

is really about what happened

in the Middle East 2000 years ago

and still happens in and through us now.

You,

marked as Christ’s own forever,

you are to give birth to Jesus now

so that God’s love can continue

to come more fully into the world.

You are called to action in his name.

Where there is injustice

you are to bring mercy.

Where there is hatred,

you are to bring grace.

Where there is anger and frustration,

you are to bear peace.

If Christmas means anything at all,

it means that you and I are entrusted

with birthing Jesus

more fully into the world.

We cannot look to any one but ourselves,

those God trusted through the Holy Spirit

to be the Church.

We cannot look to any one but ourselves

to be the instruments of change that God

begs us to be.

We must recognize that we are entrusted

with the Christmas promise

not so we can seek more gifts,

not so we can see how lucky we are,

but because to follow JC

is to seek his presence through us

in all things

to all people

in all places.

The radical truth of the Gospel

is that JC came and comes to those society forgets.

And society will always be forgetting someone

because to do so

takes away the anxiety of being real,

of being human,

of facing hardship,

and knowing our limits.

But each and every time we remember

someone that the world forgets,

each and every we put ourselves

at risk

because we dare to birth Jesus,

a little more of Christmas comes into the world

and the real Holy Family grows,

expands,

and explodes

in the sisters and brothers

of God’s justice, peace,

mercy, and love.

It’s been hard lately.

But no more so than when Quirinius

was governor.

No more so

than when Mary,

an unmarried teenage mother,

looked into the eyes of Joseph

and said,

“I’m expecting.”

This night,

worry not about the gifts

and the presents under the tree.

Give yourself

to the birthing.

To birthing of more Jesus

into this world.

Can you hear him cry

this night?

Crying for you and me?

Crying for those who others exploit?

Crying for those without room or inn

or stable this night?

*We sleep then awaken*

*we rest on the way*

*our sleep might be troubled*

*but hope is our day*

*we move on for ever*

*like children astray*

*We move on for ever*

*our feet leave no mark*

*you won't hear our voices*

*once we're in the dark*

*but here is our fire*

*this child is our spark.”*

*(The Flight,* George Szirtes)

Give yourself

to the birthing.

We need more of Jesus

to come

this Christmas.