

NATIVITY OF OUR LORD: CHRISTMAS EVE | DECEMBER 24, 2021

ISAIAH 9:2-7 | PSALM 96 | TITUS 2:11-14 | LUKE 2:1-20

In Elizabeth Strout's novel *My Name is Lucy Barton*, the eponymous narrator ruminates that "when I see others walking with confidence down the sidewalk, as though they are free completely from terror, I realize I don't know how others are. So much of life seems speculation."¹

So much of life seems speculation.

We speculate about the future, of course. We picture the various ways life unfold for us and imagine the various worlds we might inhabit. Before we make a big decision, we gather as much hard evidence as we can, but at the end of the day we never really know how it will turn out. We guess. We assume. We hope we're right.

We speculate about other people, too. We devise stories about what's going on in people's lives. We guess what they're thinking about the world (and us). We try to discern motivations to explain why people are the way they are. We guess. We assume. We hope we're right.

And perhaps we even speculate about ourselves. When a friend or family member gets a bad diagnosis or an unwanted piece of news, we speculate about how we would react if we were in their place. Who among us hasn't peered into someone else's life and wondered how we would live it? We guess. We assume. We hope we're right.

The result of all that speculating is anxiety and estrangement. Anxiety because our guesses might turn out to be wrong. The future so rarely turns out the way we'd assumed. The lives of others are rarely what we imagine. Our own actions can catch us off guard. And estrangement because all that speculating leaves us vulnerable to being hurt by others or disappointed in ourselves.

So much of life seems speculation, even in St. Luke's gospel. Elizabeth speculates about what other people think about her childlessness. Zechariah wonders about whether change is actually possible. Mary ponders why she is the favored one of God. Simeon wonders if he will live to see the messiah. Christ arrives among people who are anxious, unsure, and confused. Which is to say that Christ arrives among people who are an awful lot like us.

The birth of Christ doesn't change all of that. It doesn't give us a blueprint for the future. It doesn't make the lives of others transparent. It doesn't end the many and various trials of life. As Simeon tells Mary, *A sword will pierce your own soul, too.*

But the birth of Christ does change something. Something important. Something that changes everything else in our lives. Every relationship and identity. Every joy and concern. Every going out and coming in.

¹ Elizabeth Strout, *My Name Is Lucy Barton* (Random House Publishing Group, 2016), 14.

ADVENT LUTHERAN CHURCH

777 WYCKOFF AVENUE | WYCKOFF, NJ 07481
(201) 891-1031 | ADVENTLUTHERANWYCKOFF.ORG

Because the birth of Christ tells us everything we need to know about what God thinks of us, intends for us, and leads us toward. The birth of Christ tells us that God cares for us, loves us, and wants to be near us. In this child, God assures us that our lives have worth, that our service has meaning, and that our hopes resonate beyond our years. To put it very simply, God believes that our lives are getting involved with.

And because this child comes to us as a gift, there is nothing that can change that. So you don't need to wonder. You don't need to guess. You don't need to worry. The most significant relationship, the most fundamental identity, the most important vocation in our lives is not contingent on anything. It doesn't depend on how religious we are, how hard we pray, how much we achieve, how enlightened we get. It is settled and done. So much of life seems speculation, except for our relationship with God.

For the child born this night is the fullness of God's great love. There's no other shoe to drop. There's no change of heart down the road. There's nothing held back in case things don't work out. The Word made flesh is God's final word to and about us. And that word is *Yes*.

God says *Yes* to our desire for peace and flourishing. God says *Yes* to our desire for health and flourishing. God says *Yes* to our need for equity and justice. God says *Yes* to our desire for wholeness and reconciliation.

And God says *Yes* not just to the cast of characters at the manger two thousand years ago but to each and every one of us who gather here tonight and *Yes* to all who call this planet home. *Yes* to "all beneath life's crushing load." *Yes* to all "lost in the night." *Yes* to "the poor and meek and lowly." *Yes* to all who ponder the love of God in their hearts. Whenever the word of God is born among us at font, word, and table, God says *Yes* to us again and again and again.

We don't know how others are. We don't know what the future will bring. Sometimes we don't know who we are. Yes, so much of life is speculation. But all of Christ is love.

Joseph Schattauer Paillé, Pastor