

December 24, 2017 Christmas Eve
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Isaiah 9:2-7, Luke 2:1-20
Jan Richardson: How the Light Comes

["God With Us", by Molly Baskette, page 26, in Behold 2013, UCC.
My own ideas from a sermon on 12-24-13. Wonder by R.J.Palacia, 2012, pg. 270. Cornell West quote.

"A God with Skin On"

Grace and Peace to you, this Holy Night. Amen

In an Advent Devotional, Molly Baskette writes about a little girl who had trouble sleeping:

Molly begins, "Night after night, she'd wake her parents up and crawl in bed with them.

They loved the feeling of their young daughter snuggled up ... but [let's be honest] nobody was getting a good night's sleep."

"Finally, they put her to bed one evening with an admonishment, 'Stay in bed the whole night.'"

"She began to cry.

Panicked *they* said, '**Sweetheart, you're never really alone!**

Don't you know that God is here with you, keeping you company.'

'Yes,' she said through her sobs, 'I know that God is here.

But I just want someone with a little more skin on.'"

We just want someone with a little more skin on.

In the worries of today, let alone tomorrow,

In the grief and rage at injustice shrouded by shiny systems of oppression...

...we just want someone with a little more skin on.

God, you created the world in wonder,

you freed our ancestors through the wilderness,

you call to us again and again, we need this, we do.

And in then your divine wisdom you came to us again—again!—on that holy night so long ago,

with little more skin on.

In bold and courageous Mary, you came,

In steady Joseph,

In the angel song: *Don't be afraid,*

in the compassion, the hospitality, of that inn keeper,

in the terror and curiosity and then the wonder of the shepherds, you came.

Tonight's the night, dear people, the night when God comes again, in the cries of a baby clad

***first* in vulnerable and powerful human skin.**

That's good news when we need a God who knows our plight,

who heals and feeds, weeps and laughs,

who feels the pull of temptation and merciful forgiveness, how to die and how to live.

That's good news for we who also wear skin.

Skin replete with its beauty and its bruises, its regrets,

Skin binding together mere mortal frames and eyes bright with hopes and dreams.

This season our focus here at Hope is The Intersection of Everything.

We've looked often to this magnificent piece by our own Phil Thompson

—did you notice the familiar buildings on that sky line?

And we've heard again the faithful words of Mary: *My soul proclaims the greatness of our Lord...*

This nativity story with Mary and Joseph and the rest, we can see it as some nice tale 2000 years ago, or we can hear it as an invitation.

For you see, we have a God with skin on, so then we can more truly be in our own skin.

Then we can experience God—in the quiet center of prayer, in the daring call for justice, in the labor of learning and confession, in the wisdom of healing.

At the birth of Jesus, God and humanity intersect, but so does everything: The Intersection of Everything.

Trillion dollar tax bills, and the fears of those worried about their health care,

the genocide of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and the struggles over the holy city of Jerusalem,

immigrant families desperate to stay together, and our silent tears at the empty space at the table

or the long wait for a phone call or a diagnosis that threatens to change it all.

In the birth of Jesus, God shows up at these intersections—with skin on—that's how deep is God's love.

God invites us to live more fully, more honestly, more comfortably in our own skin, our beauty, our sin, our reconciliation.

Cornell West says, "Justice is what love looks like in public."

It was love, God's love for this whole creation, born that holy night so long ago.

These last couple of weeks my third grader and I have been reading R.J. Palacio's book called Wonder.

It's about 10 year old Auggie Pullman who was born with a rare disease that causes facial deformities.

After years of home schooling, as this book begins, Auggie is starting 5th grade at Beecher Prep

with all the usual struggles of a new kid, and the complexity of students and parents who don't understand his disease and fear even brushing against him, let alone being classmates. For months Auggie is bullied mercilessly, and isolated.

As spring arrives, on an overnight class trip to a nature reserve, Auggie and his best friend Jack have a run in with some bigger, older kids from another school.

They are frightened by Auggie's appearance and begin teasing him.

Words are cast about, fists fly, sweatshirts rip, and then thankfully three more 5th graders show up.

These three hadn't usually been trustable or especially friendly.

But in that moment they stand up for Auggie and rush him to safety.

When the terror of that night with his missing hearing aids becomes real, Auggie can hold back the tears no longer.

In perfect 5th grade compassion, one of them comforts him, "You're one brave little dude, you know that?"

And then he hugs him, holds him, wrapping him with both arms, as Auggie reflects, "like my dad would have done and he let me cry."

These are the kids, like nearly all the rest, who had orchestrated elaborate middle school games to avoid ever touching Auggie Pullman.

But in that moment, this boy held him, with both arms, as Auggie cried.

We just want a God with a little skin on.

We who are created in the image of God, we who are loved by a savior come as a baby,

it's our hands, our feet, our compassion, our willingness not to look aside when need creeps in,

but to wear our own God-given skin,

and to act and pray and love and hold and even let go, as God would have us do.

What child is this born this holy night?

This, this is God, Love, Justice, someone with a little more skin on, born to get us through the night, born to heal this world.

That Advent devotion closes in prayer, and I invite you to do the same, let us pray,

"Sweet Jesus, hold us tight, in the dark night of whatever we are going through, and give us patience and warmth to hold others who need a God with skin on. Amen."