

**December 24, 2018 Christmas Eve**

**Isaiah 9:2-7, Luke 2:1-20**

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Naomi Shihab Nye, found online at <https://gratefulness.org/resource/gate-4-a-immigration-hope-tears/>, they note...Story Source: Paul Loeb, "The Impossible Will Take a Little While: A Citizen's Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear." (Basic Books, 2007). Naomi Shihab Nye short story from Honeybee (Greenwillow Books, 2008).

Ideas and some lines from Rev. Jane McBride, First Congregational Church UCC, Minneapolis, 12-24-18.

Ideas from many sources, including: <https://youngclergywomen.org/all-this-weary-world/?fbclid=IwAR2OHziSFOJB29z63-XZYFyKYsF22Otk6MGdxFZCFHoAVOD5aFZVYa4sVM>

### **Peace Born in a Weary World**

**Grace and Peace, to you, this Holy Night. Amen**

**Palestinian-American Poet** Naomi Shihab Nye tells a lovely story that caught me this season.

She begins like this, "Wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal, after learning my flight had been detained four hours, I heard an announcement:

"If anyone in the vicinity of Gate 4-A understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately."

That was actually the very gate from which Naomi's delayed flight would leave.

With a moment of pause—for these are complicated times—Naomi returned to the gate and found an airport attendant standing with a woman in full traditional Palestinian dress, just like Naomi's grandma wore.

The woman was crying loudly.

"Help," the attendant said. "Talk to her. We told her the flight was delayed and she did this."

**Stooping down, Naomi Shihab Nye spoke haltingly in Arabic with the woman.**

It turns out she thought her flight was cancelled.

She was trying to get to El Paso for a major medical treatment the next day.

She was scared, she feared she wouldn't make it, but finally understanding, she calmed.

Together, in Arabic and English, they called up the woman's son, the one who'd be picking her up at the airport, to let him know about the change of plans.

Then, just for the fun of it, they called her other son, and then Naomi's dad, and then some poets.

They laughed, they told stories; she patted my knee, Naomi says, and they talked still more.

Cookies emerged, traditional Palestinian cookies, covered in powdered sugar.

All the other women sitting close by accepted the hospitality.

More laughter, more stories, some apple juice, compliments of the airline, with two little ones passing it out.

Naomi writes, "**I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and thought,**

**this is the world I want to live in. The shared world."**

**Dear friends in Christ, take a breath, a big, deep, Christmas Eve breath...**

In the middle of so much hubbub, so much travel, so many plans and preparations, and presents.

So much beauty, so much expectation.

In the middle of a partial government shut down, and talk of a border wall, and politics a plenty,  
in the middle of revved up kids and weary parents, and eating and cooking and more eating,  
in the middle of lonely days and long nights, and uncertain diagnoses:

Let us breathe deeply the **Peace that was born so long ago for a weary world.**

That Peace is born again this holy night, in us, we pray.

No one expected that birth of peace, not in the middle of so much.

And, to tell you the truth, I'm not sure we expect it either, but that's how God works.

**The arrival of the Christ child takes less than a verse for Luke to describe.**

"And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth,  
and laid him in a manger...."

That's all we get.

Nothing about the delivery, no report on the welfare of this babe or his mother.

Really, there's no hint that he's anything special.

In Luke's version of the story, he doesn't even have a name yet.

Mary and Joseph don't say a word.

**Do you sense the tension here?**

The birth of this child who is utterly ordinary, no consequence to anyone who matters,  
is an event of world-shifting, peace-making, significance.

The irony only deepens when the scene shifts to the shepherds on the hillside.

Mention shepherds around Bethlehem, and minds would have conjured ones who are dirty and low class,  
perhaps thieves and scoundrels.

Don't you think it's significant that these shepherds are the first to hear the angels' song?

The first to carry the cosmic message of "good news of great joy for all the people"?

**Take it another step. Let's just imagine that scene:** One heavenly angel would surely have been a sight,  
but imagine a "multitude of the heavenly hosts" filling the skies, singing, shining.

It's an army of angels. A peaceful army.

A heavenly force spreading God's peace o'er all this weary world.

Peace, the prophets had foretold.

Peace, come in flesh as a baby, vulnerable, unheralded, unnamed.  
Peace, God alone can give, peace that passes all understanding,  
Peace, swaddled in rags, sleeping in the animals' feed box.  
On this holy night, in a weary world, peace is born again.

**The birth of Christ is God's peace breaking into our very lives.**

The best we do at defining peace is the Hebrew word Shalom, the fullness, the vibrancy of life.  
But that peace doesn't come without telling or hearing the truth, often hard truth.

I'm scared... I'm angry... They're using again... I need to make a change...  
I need help... I'm tired... This just isn't how it's supposed to be...  
Hard truths, aren't they?

**In a weary world, peace is born this holy night,  
and it keeps being born, we keep learning, and practicing peace.**

Around our house, as kids grow, we hear often about the not-so-peaceful tensions in their friendships.  
"She always makes me play what she wants to play. We never get to play what I want to play."  
Or, "They leave me out." Or, "They hit me."  
I suppose like most parents, we struggle to know how to support our kids without on the one hand vilifying  
the other child, or, on the other hand, assuming that our kids are provoking this behavior in others.  
A wise counselor in our family's life offered a beautiful way to help kids reframe this relationship drama.  
"Our friends," she said, "are still learning."  
"And we are too"  
"We're all still learning to be kind, to share, to play fair."  
We're still learning: that caught my attention, that's not a kid-thing, it's a human thing.  
We are still learning how to live peacefully, faithfully, to be kind, to share, to play fair.

**And in this weary world, there is so much we're still learning.**

In a season like this, it's tempting to try and rush peace, claim it, capture it, be done learning.  
It's tempting to make peace a superficial veneer, maybe manufacture a peaceful to buy at Target.  
It's tempting to let guilt drive our peace, rather than our convictions, our hope, our need to be changed.  
It's tempting allow fear to wedge its way between us, setting concern against concern.

**Truth is, dear ones, like our children and their friends, we're all still learning,**  
learning to trust a God who'd show up in flesh and blood,

learning to trust Jesus and his radical way of loving,  
learning to trust ourselves, and our yearning for this Christ Child and the very peace he brings.

**Naomi Shihab Nye, the Palestinian-American poet,** finished her story, saying,

“I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and thought, this is the world I want to live in.”

Beloved friends, our God so long ago, looked around this weary world and said just that:

This is the world I want to live in.

“And [Mary] gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth,  
and laid him in a manger....”

Tonight in us, right here, and in the Albuquerque Airport,

and along every border that divides, Peace is born this holy night.

Now, tonight, in the squeeze of a hand or catch of an eye,

in the courage of our souls and the honesty of our bodies, weary and all,

Peace is born this holy night. May it be so.

**Amen.**