God is willing and able to dive into the mess

If we were to survey our year in review the headline would be pandemic/recession. Covid-19 may have entered our country as early as December of 2019, but by march it had infiltrated our whole country and touched everything. They may have been some areas that seemed to be more immune to the virus due to their more rural and spread out lands, and yet eventually they too were overwhelmed by the virus. After nine months enduring a pandemic, millions of people effected and 300,000 people dead in our country alone reported, people have lost businesses and their livelihood. Unemployment is through the roof, suicide rates have upticked as well as addiction and depression. We don’t know how we all will fare from this mentally. Food banks and assistance programs are being stretched thin. We are all tired and have pandemic fatigue. I say we because I too am tired of this pandemic.

Lets be honest for a minute, we all have suffered loss. We have lost loved ones to the virus, we have lost loved ones to other illnesses, loved ones have lost jobs and livelihoods. Loved ones have scared us by getting infected with the virus. And loss is not just about people dying. How many dreams have been lost this year. Wedding ceremonies that had to lack family attendance because of the virus. Trips that had been planned for and long expected had to be canceled or rescheduled. Holidays and birthdays and all sorts of celebrations had to be spent alone or without certain loved ones. Traditions had to be altered. The church building doors were locked for a period of time and for some are still shut. Remember the great toilet paper shortage of 2020, it will go down in history. We will all be telling future generations about the time we had to treasure hunt for toilet paper. To be honest it has been like the hymn a bleak midwinter. IT seemed like we were in a perpetual winter solstice in the longest night time of the year for months on end. And we still had the regular struggles of life. This year has been challenging and full of grief. Life has been especially messy this year.

The positive side to messiness is that we serve a God who is not afraid of the messiness, and Christmas is a testimony to just that. A dirty, messy stable. It’s hardly the place I would’ve picked to have the Messiah born. Yet this was the nativity in which God chose to bring forth His incarnate Son on a mission to save the world—the unlikely nativity of a wooden manger surrounded by the smells of animal dung and soiled hay. It was a place of lowly estate, not very fitting for the birth of a king. And this is where an exhausted and very overwhelmed young pregnant woman, chosen by God, goes into labor.

Our nativity scenes are much more sanitized than that first one in Bethlehem. Ours are quite cleaned up, draped with fresh garland and glistening with untainted tinsel. Joseph and Mary look peculiarly calm and at ease, hardly worn and frazzled like they just gave birth to a baby in a cluttered barn. In doing our best to tidy up the Christmas nativity, we often miss the real point of that very first manger scene.

**Christmas tells the story of a God who wasn’t afraid of our mess**—one who dwells close to the lowly ([Isaiah 57:15](https://www.bibleserver.com/text/ESV/Isaiah57%3A15)), the destitute ([Psalm 72:12-13](https://www.bibleserver.com/text/ESV/Psalm72%3A12-13)), and the weary ([Matthew 11:28-30](https://www.bibleserver.com/text/ESV/Matthew11%3A28-30)). This story, stripped down from all the glitter and gloss—the real story—gives us reason for hope.

The story of Christmas is that God is “with us” in all the chaos and mess of this human experience ([Matthew 1:22-23](https://www.bibleserver.com/text/ESV/Matthew1%3A22-23)). If God can make His abode in a noisy, smelly barn, then He can set up residence in my messy heart. He’s not intimidated by my brokenness. God entered the chaos. He came near. He brought calm to two very frightened new parents, who trusted God when they didn’t fully understand what He was up to.

God is always near. Even in loss, hardship, sickness, and suffering. Regardless of what you faced this year, you were never alone. Ever!

God is “with us” in the mess. That’s why it’s quite okay if Christmas isn’t perfect this year. It’s okay if your family photo doesn’t look like the cover of a magazine. It’s okay if the cat pulls the tree down. It’s okay if the cookies get a little burnt or the living room doesn’t have the perfect fragrance of cloves and cinnamon. Its okay if you have to see your family through a laptop, phone, or television screen. It’s okay if there are not as many gifts under the tree that you are used to. It’s okay because no matter how messy life is Christ shows up.

Remember how we were looking for hope, for a symbol of the change we were hoping for, light at the end of the tunnel that let us know that the pandemic will come to an end. And we heard and say that at two vaccines one from Pfizer and one from moderna that were approved by the FDA, It was an amazing glimmer of hope in a wild and messy time. This has indeed made me hopeful. And yet its nothing compared to the hope, peace, joy, and love I feel knowing that the Word become flesh and dwelled among us and called himself Emmanuel God with us.

It brings my excitement knowing that God entered into our human mess as a child some two thousand years ago, into a messy birth, because my life is messy. And you know what I have learned? I have learned that God welcomes the messiness. Oh, he welcomes the pretty packaged life as well, but don’t be surprised when God opens that pretty packaged life to reveal the messiness that is inside. God, wants honesty, God wants the truth of what family life is, of what our lives are. And god accepts it as it is, a package that is wrapped with unmatching paper, a torn bow, and extra tape holding it all together. God accepts the messiness of our lives and says thank you. Thank you for trusting me with this. And so this evening I invite you to join me in going to God with the messiness of your life and to plead with God to enter into our mess and give us the hope of Christmas again.

Let us pray

Thank you God, for being the God of messiness. For being the God of things not packaged in perfect paper bows. Thank you my God for loving me in the midst of the messiness of my life. For we know just as you we willing to lay aside your glory as the Word of God and be born of Mary, we know that our messiness is not overwhelming for you. May my messiness somehow be an offering to you O lord that we place at your feet with the assurance of your faithfulness towards us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.