

The season of Advent, of Christmas -typically is a time of happiness, of holiday cheer. A time when we celebrate with one another the joys of life. Christmas a time of celebration with family and friends and loved ones.

At the center of it all is the birth of a child. Both the religious and secular celebrations of Christmas focus on the joy of the season and its ability to inspire our imaginations.

As the days get shorter, as the lights grow dim and as winter sets in our mood for the holiday becomes even more evident.

But it is easy to block out all of the terrible things in the world when we turn on the TV and watch the classic holiday specials - For some it starts with the Macy's day parade on Thanksgiving and ends with the Rose Bowl Parade on New Year's. In between there are stories about helping others, awkward elves, and the unforgettable classic christmas pageant gone wrong — Good Grief Charlie Brown.

Soon, our social media feeds, and our emails will be filled with pictures of presents being opened, of families getting together of the good news in our lives during this wonderful time of the year.

When this happens it gives us some sign that, with all our worries, the future may actually turn out all right.

But we also turn on the TV and hear about death and destruction. We hear about another mass shooting in our country where the innocent are dying.

We open the newspaper or click on an article on Facebook and we read about various kinds of abuse of children are so common that only the most prominent stories get into the national news.

We continue to see the devastation that violence has in our world.

We look at our bank accounts and are reminded that we may be spending more than we can afford because of the holiday's or unforeseen expenses.

We turn around to talk with our loved ones and again are reminded that some of them are no longer with us this Christmas.

Then that smile that you are showing the world because it's the happiest time of the year --- might not be a genuine. When the bell ringer outside the store says Merry Christmas - you might think to yourself that there is nothing Merry about Christmas this year. But you smile back and wish them the same.

So we have this one side of Christmas — the one of glad tidings, the one full of cheer and happiness — the one where the children are celebrating asking Santa for the popular holiday toy.

Then we have the other side of Christmas. The one where we miss those who have died, the one where we see the continued violence in our country and around the world, the one where it may be a little hard to find the holiday cheer.

It's easy for me to get wrapped up in the parties, the presents the Happy Holiday's and Merry Christmas' —It's easy to put my energy and focus on keeping things together, on putting one foot in front of the other until I make it to new years and then finally have some time to breath and reflect on another holiday passing me by.

But I want, I need this time of the year is for all of this to mean something — something more than presents and cookies. I need to hear the good news because the rest of my week the main message that I hear is not good news, it is the reality that life is not fair, that sin continues to dominate the headlines and the pain that so many of us feel during this holiday season is often too real.

This is why I need to hear that there may be some good news that the church can offer no matter what is happening in the world.

The good news starts with the birth of a child. Mary and Joseph heard the proclamation that they would raise a child which would change the course of the world forever. Because Mary and Joseph said yes— a child came into this world —This child points us all to the love that God has for every one of us. This child grew up to be the savior of the people who live in a very broken world. This child names Jesus

What continues to amaze me is that all the things that could have gone wrong when Jesus was born did not go wrong. Mary and Joseph could have said no God — this is too much for us we do not want to have a child this way.....A medical issue could have prevented Mary from conceiving a child - -something too many people even today experience. Mary and Joseph had their child in a stable full of animals — it seemed that nothing could go right. Outside forces like we hear about today could have changed the course of history forever.

We read about the dark side trying to overtake the story of Hope.

In the movie Empire strikes back — Luke Skywalker finishes his Jedi training with Master Yoda. While this is happening Darth Vader finds an opportunity to construct a plan to capture Luke and eliminate him. Vader knows the power that Luke has to change the course of history and help light defeat darkness. To bring balance back to the force.

But plans never seem to work out when intentions are filled with hate and evil. We read today about how Herod ordered all of the first born children to their death. Herod used the power of his empire to try and eliminate a threat that Jesus brought to him. We can easily see how Jesus' life would have been in danger.

Through it all — God was watching, God was faithful even though Mary and Joseph were scared, at times they might have thought that God had abandoned them — they had this huge responsibility and things continued to spiral out of control. But they remained faithful because God was faithful to them.

They knew, like we know now - the reason that God decided to come into the world through Jesus is so we can have hope even when faced with tragedy, even when faced with death. Nothing can stop God from loving God's people.

Herod thought he had the ultimate power. He knew that something special came into the world that night. So he did what he thought was going to stop God. To ensure this threat was gone.

But God is bigger than that, Gods love, care, compassion and grace is bigger than people who think they have the right to take someone's life, bigger than the sickness, hurt and pains of our loved ones, bigger than the real, day to day problems we face, bigger than our missing loved ones.

The Christmas story of the Gospel is not about perfectly happy people, all celebrating together.

No, the Christmas story is about hope for the hopeless, about comfort for the sad and lonely, about healing for the brokenhearted.

The Christmas story is about a God who knows the very real pain of this world, and comes into the midst of the pain and violence of this world to save us.

The great comfort of the Christmas story of the Gospel is that God knows our pain and invites us to celebrate still ... God knows our pain and reminds us that his love is even stronger — stronger than darkness, stronger than pain and yes stronger than death.

Because at Christmas, real hope comes into the midst of this real and broken world.

This hope is found in the one who has saved us, the one who promises to be with us everyday. The one who becomes most real, who touches our hearts and lives when we gather together here in this place. when we pray together, sing together and receive the sacraments together.

This hope is found in Jesus - who comes into our lives and brings us this hope - who tells us that things are going to be okay because God is with us that God promises to be with us, in the good times, in the times of hurt and pain. Who tells us that we can lay all that we have at the foot of the cross and that God will pick us up, hold us in his arms and love us. Amen