

(The ushers will bring the offering forward during the prayer.)

* A PRAYER (unison)

Ever-loving, ever-giving God, as we bring our gifts to your altar, we confess our need for repentance. We have given in to the temptation to see the world and its resources as ours to use as we please. We have lived too often as if we were the center of the universe. Help us move through this season with repentant hearts so we might see not just your great blessings, but also ways to be a blessing to others. Amen

* SENDING FORTH

L: May God's grace, mercy and strength be with you.

ALL: And may I be an instrument of God's grace, mercy & strength to the world in which I live. Amen.

* MARCHING SONG

"Wade in the Water"

No. 2107

ANNOUNCEMENTS: How We'll Each Put Hands & Feet To The Gospel This Week

Always use a microphone so everyone may be included. Thank you.

POSTLUDE

"I Refuse"

Christian Chaos

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Preparation for the coming week:

Chapter 22

You may be thinking, "FINALLY! We get to the New Testament!" Yes, we'll begin to celebrate Christmas all over again. There was a small boy playing the part of the innkeeper in the annual church Christmas pageant. In the heat of the moment, he forgot his lines, so he said to Mary and Joseph what God wants us to say, "Come on in; I've been expecting you." God could use even Caesar, in ordering the census to be taken, to bring about the fulfilment of the Upper Story.

I find it interesting that humanity has such 'rules' about how things should happen. Then if/when life doesn't happen the way we think it is supposed to, it's not uncommon that there's hushed chatter [shall we call it gossip?!] begins. You know, "They've only been married six months." Or, "She shouldn't be doing that in her condition." But God's not working according to our timeline, expectations nor standards.

Some Christmases stay forever in our hearts and memories because they were so beautiful, so perfect. But other Christmases are etched in stone because they were so IMperfect. Maybe there was a flood; or the turkey burned; it snowed two feet and the relatives became surly captives for an extra two days.

But maybe it's those Christmases where everything seems to go wrong that we find the most authentic of our Christmas experiences, where we discover the Christ child in our midst. I mean, that first Christmas would never make it into anyone's family photo album of 'perfect' holiday moments. Maybe, just maybe, God does in fact understand our own lives more than we do!