



The CRISIS of CHRISTMAS¹

Dear Members and Friends of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin,

Christmas 2020 will occur while we are living through of a series of crises. Here's the list: the pandemic, economic losses, protests against racial injustices, an ongoing climate crisis, and a divided country following a contentious presidential election. I'm not going to lie, it's been stressful for me, and I imagine it has been for you, too. As Christians, we have been moving through these crisis-filled days with the expectation that God is present and God's promises are true. We move forward with hope.

The two Chinese characters for the word “**crisis**,” 危机, have often been translated as “danger” and “opportunity.” Others say that a better translation is “danger” and “change point.” What dangers do you see as your congregation moves toward celebrating the Birth of our Savior – Christmas - in a totally new way? What “opportunities” or “change points” do you see that could propel your church forward in a positive way into God's future?

Mary experienced a theological crisis when the angel Gabriel revealed to her God's plan to enter this world by the baby in her womb. Mary's body was the center of a theological crisis² - much like the theological crisis caused by a virus that has invaded the bodies of our loved ones, and the theological crisis of abused and broken black and brown bodies, and the theological crisis experienced in the misuse of this planet on which all bodies live. Where is God in the crisis? What does this mean?

In a crisis, God comes to us. John 1:1,14 *In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us.* Jesus is God, divine *and* human. God took up residence and moved into our neighborhood. God goes where God's people go and is who the people are.³ This is the theological promise of John's gospel. God is present with us in our times of crisis and suffering. This is the foundation of Luther's theology of the cross.

God is revealed through the crisis of Mary's pregnancy and Jesus' untimely birth in a Bethlehem barn. God is revealed in the crucifixion; through the body of Jesus, hanging on a cross. God is revealed through the risen body of Jesus on Easter Morning.

No matter how different Christmas is for you this year, no matter what crisis arises, God is there, present as promised, in the WORD made flesh. May the story of Jesus' birth bring you much needed joy and hope this holiday season and may the presence of God comfort you in the new year.

AMEN

Rev. Lauri Sta. Olson

¹ Photo credit: Design by Artist Paul Johnson for the 2019 Concordia College Christmas Concert Mural

² Thank you to Dr. Karoline Lewis for her thought provoking presentation to NWSWI on 11/7/2020 that inspired this article.

³ Dr. Karoline Lewis, Working Preacher.org, Dec. 2016