

God is the hope of the future.

Last year, close to Christmas time when I was visiting my family, I spent an evening babysitting my youngest great niece and her two slightly older brothers while my nephew and his wife went to dinner.

I read them the story of Christmas, and since it was their bedtime we prayed together. They'd already finished when I recalled an additional intention we should include. Little three-year-old Lucy, the youngest, shook her head. "We can't. God just left. He went out the window," she informed me. And then, to my tremendous surprise, with a smile she added, "And he wasn't wearing any pants!" Later, I found myself musing about how real, how present God was to this child in that moment. As though God were a close friend sitting in the room and conversing with us that evening.

At Christmas we remember more clearly than usual that God is that close to us and so real. The God of Christmas seeks us out. The God of Christmas is not hiding in heaven, lost among the praises of the angels. The God of Christmas is speaking to the shepherds and the baby's parents who live in the meanest and most unpromising of circumstances. The God of Christmas

knows our needs, sending the Redeemer of the world who will be received precisely in his self-giving death on the cross. In fact, in Saint Luke's gospel, the wood of the crib becomes the wood of the cross. It is that familiarity, that God could be seen without pants, which sets us free.

This Christmas, we celebrate the birth of the One who has claimed us as His own in the water of baptism. This Christmas we offer thanks to God for the saving death of Jesus and for the life-giving resurrection of Christ. Fortunately for us, children love stories. And in telling our stories of faith to the young, we turn those stories around in magnificent and vibrant ways. We become witnesses that the future is not left up to us and that life, even in a threatening world, is worth living – and that not because children are the hope of the future, but because God is the hope of the future. We ask that God would feed us in this moment, with the body and blood of the Son who is our food, our forgiveness, our life and our salvation – our hope of the future. Have a blessed Christmas!

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