

**Sermon Outline - Sun, Dec 24, 2023 –
(Matthew 2)**

- Christmas and this last week of the year is a special time for reflection
- There is a tendency to try to make everything perfect and add a shiny veneer
- However, this year, in the midst of war and turmoil all around us, it is in many ways most true to the first Christmas
- And so we zoom into the story of Bethlehem – this year
- Moment of meditation w/ Majalia Jackson’s version of O Little Town of Bethlehem.

*O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight*

- My connection to Bethlehem – trips in 2015 & 2018 – cross stich collective
- Visiting the garden full of gas cannisters
- This year they have cancelled many of the festivities in Bethlehem
- Rev. Munther Isaac says, “God is under the rubble”-
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/23/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-bethlehem-christmas.html>
- In many ways this is actually a realer Christmas than usual – Hope and Fear
- Manger, Magi, and Massacre
- The Good News is that God shows up to the people and places that need it most.

Key Points

1. Keep it Real – Acknowledge the Mess
2. Look for God in the Midst of the Rubble
3. Get closest to the most vulnerable because that is where God is

Reflection Questions - Let’s make that practical in our practice today and tomorrow.

1. How can we choose a keep it real Christmas and resist the need to pretend like all is well? What is the mess or mourning that you need to embrace as a central part of your practice?
2. How can we see God amidst the rubble? Where can we embrace challenging situations as exactly the kind of place that God shows up? Where is there mess in our lives or communities that we can re-examine as an opportunity for the Christ child?
3. In your Christmas practice and in the coming week how can you get closest to the most vulnerable? Is that you? Someone in your family or community? Unhoused folks? Where is there an open door?