

**DECEMBER 24, 2025**

**WHEN GOD INTERRUPTS THE ORDINARY**

*By Pr. Beate Chun*

**It is Christmas Eve!**

Grace to you and peace  
from the one who is,  
and the one who was,  
and the one who is to come.

The holy night is finally here.

Some of us have been preparing for it  
for a long time,  
some of us perhaps adopted  
an Advent ritual,  
took time for reflection and quiet moments.

And others—  
myself included—  
may have been rushing  
until the last minute,  
trying to get everything ready and organized,  
and coping with numerous  
unexpected surprises  
and interruptions.

But no matter how you have  
arrived here,  
the holy night has come

and is now here,  
with gifts for all of us.

And what are the gifts of this night?

This holy night,  
with its music  
and sacred stories,  
invites us into a new way  
of being in the world.

We are invited to  
pause,  
to listen,  
and to respond.

Which is so different from  
how we usually react.

And so, tonight,  
I want to walk through the Christmas story  
with this simple movement:

*Pause.*

*Listen.*

*Respond.*

## **The first invitation: to pause**

And I want to begin  
where the story begins.  
With the shepherds.  
In the story, it is night,  
deep night,  
perhaps even bitterly cold.

The shepherds are out in a field,  
watching over their sheep.  
And then suddenly there is an angel  
and a bright light.

The shepherds are terrified.  
But the angel says:  
“Do not be afraid.”

So what is being asked  
of the shepherds in that moment  
is to pause and to trust.  
Not to run.  
Not to hide in fear.  
But to pause,  
and to be open-minded  
in the face of this strange event.

We are not so different from  
the shepherds.  
Often, when we are startled,  
or confronted with something new—  
something we have never seen,  
never experienced—  
we tend to pull back.  
We might even break off contact.  
Or we make fun of the situation  
and write it off as ridiculous.

And here the invitation is to pause for a moment,  
and to lean into this strange thing.  
Not to react immediately,  
but to take our time...

to make room for our own uncertainty,  
to make room for wonder,  
and perhaps even for fear.

So the first Christmas invitation is to pause  
and to say to ourselves:  
I can bear this.  
I can stay present.  
I don't have to run away.

## **The second invitation: to listen**

Next comes the invitation to listen.

Once the shepherds have recovered from their fright,  
they begin to listen to the angel.

The angel has a strange,  
joyful, and astonishing message.

A Savior is born!

A Savior?

What is that supposed to mean?

We already have a Savior,  
or so we are told.

Our Savior is the Emperor Augustus!

Did you know that?

That back then people were told  
that the emperor Augustus  
was the Savior of the world?

Yes, that was his public title!

The official propaganda  
and the imperial cult  
declared that Augustus  
was the Savior of the world—  
and the bringer of peace,  
and the guarantor of order, health, and salvation.

It was said that with his birth  
a new era had begun!

Augustus was even described  
as the “Son of God,”

because Julius Caesar had been declared a god,  
and Augustus was the son  
of the deified Julius Caesar.

And now the angel claims  
that all these titles,  
all these mighty and glorious titles,  
do not belong to the emperor in Rome,  
but to a newborn child  
in a stable in Bethlehem...

And suddenly many angels appear,  
and they praise God, saying:  
“Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace on earth  
to those whom he favors.”

These are the astonishing things  
that the shepherds heard that night.  
It contradicted everything they had known until then,  
everything that had been taught and told.  
And yet, the shepherds listened;  
they took it in.

We too are invited to listen.  
That sounds easy at first.  
But listening—  
really listening—  
is not easy at all.

We are always distracted.  
Our child wants to tell us  
about their school day,  
but we only half-heartedly listen  
while we are chopping carrots  
and preparing dinner.

Or an aunt tells a story.  
We already know the story.  
She tells the same story every time.  
So we don't really listen,  
and we let our thoughts wander.

Or a friend tells us about a problem.  
And while she is still speaking,  
we are already thinking of solutions.  
We want to have an answer ready  
the moment she finishes.  
But often the friend  
doesn't want a ready-made answer.  
Often she will find her own answer  
if only someone truly listens—  
listens with their whole heart.

That is how listening works.  
It is sometimes quite difficult.

And what if we hear something  
that is the exact opposite  
of what we believed until now?  
Our Savior is not  
the emperor in Rome,  
and not the president of the United States,  
but a small, poor child  
in a stable?

How do we deal  
with such new information?  
Sometimes we retreat  
to our old position.  
We harden our opinion.  
We build a big, thick, solid wall  
around our old views,  
so no one can challenge them.

Or we do the opposite.  
We throw out everything  
that once seemed right and important.  
Everything is discarded at once.  
We don't want to be Christians anymore;  
now we'll be Buddhists.

We don't want to be materialists—  
now we'll be minimalists.

But listening also means  
listening to our own heart,  
to our own inner wisdom.

And then we weigh everything—  
the new things we hear,  
and the wisdom in our hearts—  
and in this way we can find a way forward,  
a way that honors the old  
and yet remains open to the new.

So now we've had  
the invitation to pause  
and the invitation to listen.  
Our final invitation is to respond.

### **The third invitation: to respond**

Now how did the shepherd respond?  
First they spoke among themselves:  
What was that?  
What does it all mean?  
Did we imagine it?  
Was it a dream?  
But how could we all  
have had the same dream?  
And so they decided to go and see  
what this was all about.

I love it how the shepherds  
wanted to investigate their vision  
and form their own opinion.  
So often we pass on news  
without checking it properly—  
especially with Facebook and other social media.

And it is not always easy to figure out  
what is real news  
and what is fake news.  
And unfortunately,  
many messages are a terrible mixture  
of real and fake.

And so we really have to do our homework;  
we really do,  
and check out the various stories,  
see if it adds up,  
see what the sources are.

So, the shepherds decide  
to check things out,  
and they finally arrive at the stable.

And then, suddenly,  
they are certain.  
Yes, the angel was right.  
Yes, here is the child.  
The Son of God.  
Our Savior.

And then the shepherds spread the word.  
They talked about it everywhere they went,

Which means that  
they themselves became angels.

Because that is what an angel is:  
a messenger.  
We often imagine that angels  
are some sort of floaty creatures  
with wings and white robes.

But an angel is simply a messenger.  
And therefore, any person  
can be an angel.

That is the invitation of responding:  
to bear witness to what we have seen,  
and heard, and experienced.

There are many ways we can bear witness:  
We can respond with words,  
and we can respond with actions.  
Sometimes actions  
speak louder than words.  
We can share where others hoard.  
We can listen where others look away.  
We can comfort where others judge.  
We can make peace where others stir up conflict.

In all these many ways  
we can say something  
about Christmas and about God,  
and about the Savior  
who was not born in a palace  
but in a stable.

This is how Christmas  
still happens.  
Tonight.  
Here.  
In us.  
Through pausing, listening, and responding.

May you have a holy Christmas.  
**Amen.**

**Sermon for Christmas Eve, December 24, 2025**

**Presented at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church San Francisco**

**Text: [Luke 2:1-14, 15-20 NRSVue - The Birth of Jesus - In those days a - Bible Gateway](#)**

**Tags: Christmas | Luke 2 | Pausing | Listening | Responding**