



Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA

God's work. Our hands.

A Christmas message from Bishop Meghan Johnston Aelabouni – December 2025

A couple of months ago, Gabi and I were going through some boxes we still hadn't unpacked after returning to the U.S. last year, and we found a treasure: our olive wood nativity set from Bethlehem. We couldn't find it last year and feared it had been lost in the move. But suddenly, when we weren't looking for it, there it was: the stable, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi, an angel, some sheep, a camel—and of course, a manger and a baby Jesus. (None of the smooth wood figurines have distinguishing features, so we take our best guess on who's who.)

There is a tradition to only place baby Jesus in the nativity on Christmas Eve, to mark the day and what it means: Jesus arrives! Jesus is born. God chooses to take on a human body and a human life in the midst of our world. This is the good news of Christmas, and the heart of our faith. Everything that comes after—Jesus' ministry of compassion and justice, his death on the cross, and his resurrection to new life—begins here and now. Jesus is God with us, God fully present in a person who is fully human. And God arrives, not only as a human being, but a child: a vulnerable, fragile, beautiful baby who depends on others for his very survival. Jesus' life, in the beginning as in the end, is placed in the hands of humanity: not so that we can prove our worthiness to God by doing the right thing, but to show that even when we don't—when we squander the gift of divine love and crush the gift of human life—we ourselves are in the hands of a God who turns fear into love, despair into hope, and death into life.

This good news still matters. Jesus still matters! Around the world there are nativity scenes waiting for Jesus to arrive, trusting in a God who so loves the world that God becomes part of it. Some nativities are set up to remember Jesus the refugee, who with his parents fled to another country to escape state violence. Some are set up to remember that Jesus was Jewish and Palestinian, from a land whose children now live among the rubble of bombs. Some will be set up by people who are spending their first Christmas without a loved one, or contemplating their last; or in families where there is new life this year that last year had not yet arrived.

But in every single nativity, in every single place, we know this: Jesus will arrive. Jesus always arrives. Jesus shows up in this world, even and especially where things are heartbreaking, where fear and grief are running high and hope is running low. We may misplace our nativity, or even our faith; but we cannot truly lose Jesus or be lost. The child of the manger so long ago and far away held enough love to hold the world forever. Jesus still shows up in big ways and small: in forgiveness and generosity, in caring for the neighbor and welcoming the stranger. And in the places where all seems lost, as it did on the cross, Jesus is there too in all the power of resurrection life, promising that the worst thing will not be the last thing. May this promise not only fill your nativities, but also fill your hearts and lives this year and always. May God with us bless you with hope, with courage, with love. Merry Christmas!

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