O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the ***mystery of that Light*** on earth, may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen*.

It is really curious to me that Christmas, more than any other time within the calendar, retains a lot of  childhood wonderment, for me and many others I know. And yet thinking about the span of Christmases in my life, Christmastide, more than any other, points out to me how my perspective has changed with age. There was this time in early years when all I remember is the toys that Santa brought.  This was all tied emotionally together with the countless pageants in which I participated- an angel, a shepherd, a choir member, never Mary (I won too many “most enthusiastic” ribbons in camp to ever be considered for the part of prayerful, serene Mary.) Of course, my perspective changed as I got older to a recognition that no matter what, even if my parents got me the “perfect” present, the Santa gift glee no longer overwhelmed me. Moving into my college years, I actually begin to remember the topic of some sermons and the focus changed; it was less about what was under the tree and more about who was in the manger.

Now, it’s not hard to understand, but it is hard to put in words why Christmas keeps the childhood wonderment, which can even overcome grief in the time of Christmas, but it does.

Emmanuel- God with us.

The birth story of Jesus is so well known by us. It may still have wonder, but it is not what one would immediately call fresh, and maybe that is part of the wonder. There is just a wonder around what it means: God with us.

We all know the characters of this Lukan Gospel.  There is a census, pregnant Mary with her betrothed Joseph have to travel, on or off a donkey, to the town where Joseph is from in order to be counted/ registerd.  This narrative has lots of traveling. Joseph and Mary journey to a place not familiar to them. Within a culture that prides itself on being hospitable they can’t find proper lodging.  The shcpherds are out doing their usual shepherd thing, watching their flocks by night and then they must travel, are compelled to travel, to find the birthplace of their messiah.  Later, later, during Epiphany, the magi also will journey.

All this journeying appears on first glance not to be the kind of journeying we, here in the US, make around Christmas in order to be with our family and friends—to rekindle the hearth with memories and warm thoughts of love of past Christmas days.  The  journeying in the Gospel is anything but that. It is all dislocating: these particular journey-makers are all headed to the uncomfortable and utterly new.  In some sense, it is the very ordinary birth of a child, but he is an extrordinary child, born to be Emmanuel, born to be God with us, that will take them all to places they did not imagine they would go, literally or figuratively.

But of course, our journeys can be dislocating too, in their way. We are not itinerant shepherds or under the stress of Mary and Joseph, but our own journeys, even to the home and company of family or friends, can also take us to places of dissomfort in our hearts. Places of unresolved issues of identity, old wounds, or grief for things lost in our lives.

So it is the insecurity of the journey-takers, like our own insecurities and loses, that leads us and points us to our greatest love and security of the heart of God. This particular journey to the celebrated birth of all time, is but the beginning of our training for the journey as we walk with Christ.

It is the light shining in the darkness, the star leading towards Jesus the baby, wrapped  in swaths of clothes and lying in a feed-trough, the very light that makes it all new and all fresh, despite the familiarity.

As theologian Friedrich Schleirmacher wrote, “[it] cannot be other than the appearance of the Redeemer as the source of all other joy in the Christian world; and for this reason nothing else can deserve to be so celebrated as this event” In the manifestation of grace on Christmas Eve, the Christ comes once more to us. This journeying is the beginning of God with us, the birth of our true home—the begining of our belonging.

And so in our belonging, in our security, we, like Mary, treasure the extraordinary, and trust that God is with us also in all our ordinary, in the ordinary things of Christmas, of warmth and security and home in all the ways that God in Jesus, Emmanuel is our true home.  And that is extraordinary, for God is with us.