

**Rev. Nathan Detering**  
**December 8, 2019**  
**“Nativity Translated”**

Maybe like many of you who decorate for the holidays,  
This past week brought to my house the annual tradition of rummaging  
In the basement to find the right boxes filled with the seasonal-appropriate  
Decorations.

Where are the lights? Where is the green extension chord?  
Where is the star cut from the cereal box and wrapped in foil that goes  
On top of the tree, the one we made 20 years ago whose corners are bent  
And wrinkled, not unlike me...because the years do add up,  
But in the right light and mood still can shine, just like any of us.

And where is the wooden nativity crèche that goes on the shelf  
Before there was Elf on a Shelf? Where is that?  
Not in the ornament box. Not in the newly bought LED lights box.  
Not in the Santa and reindeer-themed coffee mug and dishes box,  
Because apparently you can never have enough dishware.  
Not in the random box that everything else goes into.

Says Karyn, *“Have you checked in the Halloween box?”*

No.

*“Check there; I don’t think Jesus and his crew fit into the other boxes when  
we put everything away last year.”*

Even in the basement, it seems, there is no room at the Inn.

So I pull the lid off and sure enough....there it is underneath the  
Light-up skull and the giant foldable spider,  
Our own little Nightmare Before Christmas.

As I reclaim Jesus and his crew, taking bits of that white cotton stretchy  
Stuff meant to look like cobwebs you can buy at Halloween off

Of Mary's halo,

I have this thought:

I feel sorry for Jesus; I feel sorry for the shepherds, and the wisemen,  
And the sheep and donkey, whose home was taken by something akin  
To Holy Eminent Domain,

And, of course, I feel sorry for Joseph and Mary...

These parents, the migrants, this mom and dad without papers  
Who were headed to their hometown to get registered, as Caesar  
Demanded. Sound familiar?

For the last year this whole scene has lived the Halloween box in my  
basement,

And now that its reclaimed its fate isn't much better...taking its place

On the middle level book of shelves where as the days go on,

Holiday cards will get put around it and then in front of it,

And the dog's tail will maybe whack it to the floor from too-vigorous  
wagging,

Which means I'll have to re-glue Jesus back into his manger once more,

And some errant tinsel will spin free from the tree in the next room

And wrap around Joseph's feet like tripwire.

All of which is to say: this whole scene, this whole story,  
The whole meaning of all this....is so easily lost and domesticated  
And obscured and forgotten.  
Which is why I have so enjoyed listening this fall to the choir  
As they have rehearsed (and rehearsed and rehearsed)  
This story we have heard again and again, but whose  
Meaning gets lost on us...until, like this morning,  
We hear it in a new language, and we read the translations  
(for those of us who can't remember our high school Spanish),  
And we listen as the nativity gets taken from the boxes and basements  
Of our expectations and gets set anew into the rural regions of Argentina.

And as we let the music wash over us and we let our thoughts wander  
And we write our sermons and we ask what all this might have  
To do with us these 2000 years later, we who this season  
Are mixed all up into our different beliefs, our hopes for year,  
Our resolutions in varying degrees of accomplishment,  
Politics storming around...like all of us are inside a snow globe  
That won't stop shaking,  
Let me invite us to remember these things, inspired by this music  
And the ancient story it tells:

How maybe unwed teenage mothers are probably some of the strongest  
People in the world.

How there are wise men and wise women to be found among  
Undocumented travelers from far off lands, and that they might just show

Us what God is.

How in these times we need to hear a stories where tyrants tremble because  
heaven has come to peasants.

How in this story God loves the animals just as much as the people,  
And we know this because they are among the first witnesses to the birth.

How there are lights in our life, there are stars, and we can follow them  
Even if everything around us seems dim.

And how in this story, contrary to way we're too often told and see in these  
times,  
Gentle and strong people win, and the powerful and violent take a back seat,  
And the last are the first and the first and the last,  
And a little baby, as all new life reminds, shall lead us.

Choir, we are yours...