

# “Jesus Flips the Script”

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## **Context: Then and Now**

The Christmas Story of Luke’s Gospel begins with Emperor Augustus’ decree that all the world should be registered. Because of this decree Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem, the city of their ancestors, where Jesus is born. The holy family is a poor and insignificant family by societal standards. They are powerless and unimportant, just some among a sea of undocumented people under Roman occupation who are now being forced into a registry. And to be clear, the registration of Mary and Joseph is not one meant to give status, but one that demeans.

The holy family does not have citizenship within the Roman Empire; they do not have legal rights and are treated as subhuman. We live in a country where this dynamic of exclusion and oppression is familiar: many immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers find it virtually impossible to get citizenship. They find themselves locked out of society; for them, there is no room in the inn. For all of us who feel solidarity with the holy family in going through a degrading process of registration, we should extend that solidarity to all who are undocumented in our country, to refugees from Syria and around the world, and to Muslims in the US, who fear they may be forced into a national registry by Trump’s administration. That’s why we put up a big banner outside with a picture of the holy family that reads “Immigrants and Refugees Welcome.”

## **The Beauty and Meaning of the Christmas Story**

The beauty of the Christmas story is that it subverts the value-system of the Empire—by faith we receive its message that Jesus, a poor Jewish peasant, is so much more important than the Emperor Augustus or anyone else who wields a merely worldly form of power.

Jesus, a poor child lying in a manger, is a sign from God. Angelic messengers respond to his birth by notifying shepherds, who by worldly standards are rough characters and lower-class even among marginalized Jews. The story of Jesus’ birth is one that flips the script on who is important and who has authority. The boldness of Christmas faith is to look at Mary and Jesus and see God’s power revealed in weakness, to see God’s message delivered in such a way that it turns the world upside down and changes the way we see ourselves.

## **Jesus' True Authority Contrasted with Mere Political Power**

We live in a time when it is easy to confuse power for true authority. In the Christmas Story the Emperor clearly has power over Jesus, but Jesus has moral and spiritual authority. He's so much more real than the Emperor because he is a leader in the liberating work of God: Jesus speaks God's word of truth, heals the sick, advocates for the oppressed, and teaches the love-centered way of life that will be the foundation of a new society, a beloved community on Earth.

Today we have a President-Elect who reminds us so much of an Emperor Augustus or another biblical tyrant, Pharaoh, who enslaved and oppressed the Jews in Egypt. His narcissism and lack of moral integrity is so palpable and striking: throughout his campaign and for years prior he has peddled in lies, racism, misogyny and baseless conspiracy theories, and yet our news media is now obsessed with everything he tweets night and day. Sadly, because of the power of his office, many Americans will believe what he says, or if not believe it than acquiesce to it. Brothers and sisters, now more than ever we need to claim the faith of Christmas, the faith of Jesus, the faith to flip the script.

## **Claiming Our Inner Authority as Children of God & Flipping the Script**

When we let someone like Emperor Augustus or Donald Trump or even an oppressive boss or parental figure become our authority we can get trapped and diminished. But when we let our inner authority emerge and grow in us like it did in Jesus, we are set free from mental slavery and find our true dignity as children of God.

So let's flip the script:

Let's love our enemies, give to anyone who asks. Let's flip the script the way Jesus did.

In a country that is run by rich white men, let's start listening to people of color, women, and people who are poor; let's tell a new story of who we are.

In a country with a legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, let's join the movement for Black Liberation until Black Lives Matter in all parts of our society and economy.

In a country founded on genocide of Native Americans and ecocide of our environment, let's look to Standing Rock and accept the wisdom and leadership of Native Elders and Water Protectors; if we listen, they will teach us how to care for and respect our Mother Earth and all creatures.

In a consumerist society, let's simplify our lives and measure ourselves by how we love not what we own.

And let's flip the script on Christianity and religion. Instead of being coopted by the far right of xenophobia and exclusivism, let's have an open faith that expresses love for all. Instead of Anti-Semitism, let's promote love and respect for our Jewish siblings in faith; instead of Islamophobia, let us be known for our Islamophilia, love of Islam, and for protecting Muslims from oppression.

I really believe that in everything we do in this community at Common Street Spiritual Center, we should seek to flip the script!

### **Co-Creating our Call to Action**

Sisters and brothers, let's beat our swords into plowshares and become peacemakers. Let's seek a peaceful world and demand an end to war and violence as a way to resolve conflicts. Let us be people who stand up for the human rights of all, for clean water, health care, education, and culture. Let's be people in a busy world who take time to listen and understand those who are suffering. With the faith of Christmas we can do all this and more.

And now I want your help...how else can we flip the script in our world and in our lives?

***\*There were many inspiring ideas and examples from the congregation that night\****

Sisters and brothers, it takes faith to turn our lives away from conformity towards the truth. The story of Jesus flips the script and turns the world upside down; it helps us see past what seems important and what seems to have power over us; it is a story that lets us see through everything that is false and discover within ourselves the true light of God.

This Christmas I invite you to discover the birth of Jesus within your own life. Amidst all the noise of our world, amidst the loud voice and dark fog of our own egos, I invite you to find that inner light and voice of love that makes you truly human and truly divine, and I invite you to claim that spiritual center within as your most important source of truth and guidance.

And may you live in a way that turns the world, over and over again, in the direction of an Ever Greater Love.

Can I get an Amen?