If you talk with a typical American child below the age of 7 and ask them what they’d like to know about Christmas, here are some of the questions you might get:

_I wonder how Santa carries enough toys in his sleigh for all the children in the world._

_I wonder how Santa gets into my house since I don’t have a fireplace . . . [well actually if they’ve seen the movie The Santa Clause with Tim Allen they might not ask that question anymore.]_ 

_I wonder why nobody can see Santa’s house at the North Pole._

When children come to understand the true meaning of Christmas, here are some of the questions they might begin to ponder:

_I wonder where Jesus lived before he came to earth?_ 

_I wonder why Jesus was born in a stable instead of a hospital?_ 

_I wonder why and how God became a baby?_ 

_I wonder . . . _

What do you wonder? 
Or do we wonder? 
Perhaps we only wonder why Christmas isn’t the way it used to be.
Perhaps we wonder this especially this year which seems a little darker somehow—
in the shadow of the national mood following the events in Ferguson and Staten Island and just a few days ago in Manhattan. Or maybe it’s the global hot spots like North Korea, the Middle East, and the Ukraine. Or the number of deaths and fear caused by the Ebola outbreaks . . . So many dark nights, dark times today it seems.

And yet we have space ships, the internet, microchips, modern medicine - all wonders in their way- mysteries of science revealed that even our grandparents could not have foretold; yet we have become a generation characterized not by awe, but by cynicism and sarcasm and disbelief. We have lost something. Something powerful. Something needed. Something to reawaken our souls. Could it be that we have lost wonder?

Theologian G. K. Chesterton wrote, "The world will never starve for want of wonders, but only for want of wonder." Wonders are all around us, but it is the sense of wonder that is missing and most needed in our lives. Are we starving from want of wonder?
This loss of wonder reminds me of a Subaru commercial that had a lot of airtime in the past few months. A father drives his son around on a road trip to see some of North America’s great sights. First they stop to see the tallest trees in the world—the Redwoods of California. The boy says, “I thought they’d be bigger.” Then the father and son are off to the Grand Canyon, where the boy takes a look and just shrugs, not impressed. But the father keeps trying and brings his son to a field where bison roam. One of the great creatures walks right up to the window to get a close look at the boy and . . . finally, his son is impressed.

The slogan of the commercial is: “There’s nothing I can’t reach in my Subaru—Love—it’s what makes a Subaru a Subaru.”

When I first saw this commercial I thought it was a bit depressing that the Redwoods and the Grand Canyon did not instill any wonder in this boy. I thought, are children today so jaded that they have lost their sense of wonder? And yet . . . it came to me that an up-close and personal encounter with a being of “flesh and blood” had awakened this boy’s sense of wonder.

Now I’m fairly certain the creators of this commercial and Subaru’s slogan had only sales of cars in mind and yet
there are definite spiritual and theological overtones to this little vignette that taps into our longing and need for connection and love and, yes, wonder.

*The dictionary defines wonder as a feeling of surprise mingled with admiration caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar or inexplicable.*

The first Christmas was full of wonder—
full of beauty and unexpected surprises.
The familiar and ordinary became
unexpected and extraordinary and . . .
wonderful.
In a time of human history that was just as dark and uncertain as ours seems today,
a pregnant teenager and her fiancé make their way to a small town where they can only find shelter in a stable.
There this teenager gives birth to her firstborn son—
A birth that will change the world.

It’s an audacious claim, when you think about it:
that the birth of a baby to an unwed teen amid the squalor of a backwater town could possibly matter.
And yet there, wonder of wonders, the promise of the Gospel is:
that God regularly shows up where we least expect God to be and always with us and for us.
So though this world be dark, it is not forsaken, and the headlines we read and worry about will have their day and then fade again against the backdrop of this story we’ve been telling and hearing now for nearly 2000 years.

Here is the wonder of Christmas: God loves this world! And God will not give up on it…or us. Moreover, God continues to come to love and bless this very world and invites us to do the same. In Christ, God reaches out to the entire world to offer connection, mercy and love that is up-close and personal, that had flesh and blood on it . . . and still has through you and I—the body of Christ.

Composer and singer and music historian, John Jacob Niles spent many years wandering around the Appalachian Mountains in search of the origins of folk songs. "I Wonder As I Wander grew out of three lines of music sung for me by a girl who called herself Annie Morgan. The place was Murphy, North Carolina, and the time was July, 1933. The Morgan family, revivalists all, were about to be ejected by the police, after having camped in the town square for some little time, coking, washing, hanging their wash from a monument in the town square and generally conducting themselves in such a way as to be classed a public nuisance. Preacher Morgan and his wife pled poverty; they had to hold one more meeting in order to buy enough gas to get out of town.
It was then that Annie Morgan came out—a tousled, unwashed blond, and very lovely. She sang the first three lines of the verse of "I Wonder As I Wander". At twenty-five cents a performance, I tried to get her to sing all the song. After eight tries, I had only three lines of verse, a garbled fragment of melodic material—and a magnificent idea. With the writing of additional verses and the development of the original melodic material, "I Wonder As I Wander" came into being.”

He found the words and the music of Annie’s song to be deeply spiritual and thoughtful, but also that they contained the joy and the wonder of Christmas. When Niles introduced the song just before the beginning of World War II, people were awed with his discovery. Until his death in 1980, Niles continued his search for the source of the carol. He never found its author and concluded that the girl was an angel who had been sent to deliver a message of Christ’s birth.

_I wonder . . ._

It’s understandable how we can lose our sense of wonder as we struggle to see God amid the desolate headlines. Perhaps we wonder where God is amid our own more private pain of ruptured relationships, lost loved ones, loneliness, illness, job loss, or depression. Or maybe it’s just that we get caught up in the day-to-day routine of making ends meet that we have a hard time
imagining that God could possibly make a difference in our world.
Sure, maybe we believe in God in general, but sensing God’s presence – let alone seeing God – in the nitty-gritty of our mundane lines seems a bit much.

Perhaps the problem isn’t that it is impossible to see God, but rather that we are prone to look in all the wrong places.
Rather than speculate about God’s existence, the gospel of John says, we should look to Jesus. And when we do that, we encounter the God who took on flesh and blood, who took on our lot and our life that we might have hope.
Our sense of wonder needs to be awakened by God’s Word wearing flesh and blood.

In the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ we see that God is so for us and with us that we cannot be defined according to the shadows of sin and death, our personal demons or the darkness of our times.

The wonder of wonders is that because God so loved the world . . .
the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.
The wonder of wonders is that God so loved the world that he gave his grace, mercy and love in his Son. Don’t ask me how . . . I can’t explain it,
I can only feel a deep surprise mingled with awe when with the eyes of faith I see Love and Grace so beautiful, unexpected, and inexplicable . . .
I can only wonder with Annie Morgan, and John Jacob Niles, Mary and Joseph and the shepherds and angels and all those awakened to wonder by the mystery that Jesus our Savior came as a baby born for poor ordinary people like you and like me.

Beloved people of God, a child has been born for us! A son given given to us! Come, share in the wonder!