

Sermon for Christmas Eve  
Friday , December 24, 2021  
“The Story of a Birth”

Text: Luke 2:1-20; John 1:1-16

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I am so glad that we are here tonight. This time last year, we couldn't sing hymns, so our traditional Christmas Eve Mass was adjusted—let's say—into a pre-recorded mass that was then broadcast at 8 PM on December 24. Unless you were one of the chosen few chosen who came a few days earlier and sat maximally distant from each other in order to record a Christmas Eve mass, you all watched it on your tvs, computers, or smart phones. Not the best way to celebrate Christmas Eve, but it's what we had to do. But today, even though we are still dealing with the coronavirus, even though many decided not to come out tonight for fear of the omicron variant that has surged in recent days, we are here.

So, why *are* we here? Is it to see the beautiful decorations? Is it because you missed the heartwarming music? Singing lots of carols and Silent Night at the end? Is it in order to hear once again the idyllic story of a pregnant young woman and her husband who had no choice but to take lodging in the stable of a hospitable Bethlehem family? Is it for the precious images of shepherds trying to catch a glimpse of a cute little baby lying in a wooden manger? Is it for the electrifying sermon by the priest? Why are we here? Why are you here? Because of the incredible gift that humanity was given on that night in Bethlehem long ago. We are here to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The story of the Nativity is a story about a birth. None of us can remember our birth. Oh, perhaps the story of your birth was told to you by your mother or father. For most of us, the details of our birth story is not all that important and certainly not known to billions of people around the world. Our birth story probably never made it past a family dinner conversation...once or twice, but for a certain little baby born in Bethlehem of Judea over 2,000 years ago, we're still talking about it and we celebrate it every year. His birth is so important, that the Bible even gives us details so we know exactly when what took place took place. St. Luke the Evangelist gave us those details in the Gospel passage that we just heard a few moments ago. Luke gave us many details about the birth, to place it in the context of a certain time. He left out a lot of details, too. He didn't tell us anything about midwives, labor pains, contractions, water breaking, boiling water, or a comfortable bed. All Luke tells us where it comes to location is that it was in a plain, unnamed stable because there was no room in an unnamed inn. In fact, the “inn” was probably a cave!

This child's birth has been the topic of a season for over 2,000 years, because this is God whose incarnation among humans we celebrate. The creator of the entire

universe loved us so much that he became one of us; he loved us so much that he subjected himself to the vulnerability of infancy, the burden of adolescence, the evolution into adulthood. He loved us so much that he spent some of his adult years teaching humankind how to live in a better manner amongst ourselves, how to treat one another with respect, how to love one another. He loved us so much that he wanted to show us how to make this world a better place for all humanity. He loved us so much that he was even willing to be tortured and crucified, so that he could show us that he was real, and that he loved us more than we could ever imagine, and that once we knew that, we'd also know that there is something to strive for after this mortal life is finished. Jesus' being born means that our ultimate salvation is guaranteed! That's what the name of Jesus means...Yeshu'a: salvation—he saves.

Most of the time when we talk about Jesus and salvation, we're talking in a cosmic, celestial, or spiritual sense. We talk about the afterlife. We talk about the things at some future time that we have no idea when will be. We talk about new bodies, new mansions, new realities. But the birth of Jesus is important to saving us right now, in our very lives. The birth of Jesus also means the salvation from ourselves. Jesus came into a world 2,000 years ago that had lots of problems and it still had problems when he left. And we still have struggles, difficulties, suffering, disaster, and the like. But Jesus's birth and his life—God's coming down to earth and dwelling among us—gave us a chance to see how God envisions that our lives could be better. Jesus's birth and life is the way that God shows us how to get along with one another. Jesus's birth and life is the way that God shows us how he gave us the gifts and tools to overcome any difficult situation that we might face—not that it would suddenly disappear, but that we have the strength to carry on, and if we survive, we will be stronger for it.

Some people here may have been sick, or lost loved ones, or has been going through a big life change in the past year. The holiday season is notorious for causing us to reflect on the things that bring our spirits down. But the birth of Jesus, the one who saves, is what can save us from ourselves, because he gives us hope that there is a future, if we just hold on—keep on keeping on, as my grandmother used to say—whatever is worrying us will be behind us. Whatever darkness we think we're facing, the light of Christ will illumine our path.

Today we celebrate an event from over 2000 years ago when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us—God pitched a tent in the midst of the chaotic world and became one of us to show us how to be more like him and how to live with each other. The celebration of the nativity reminds us that the love of God and the light of Christ constantly breaks into our broken world, and that gives us hope. He came to a world that was as dysfunctional then as ours is now. We just have more powerful machines and weapons, and better technology. Celebrating his birth every year reminds us that we can be kind, generous, thankful, and loving in a world that desperately needs more

kindness, generosity, gratefulness, and love. So this Christmas and every Christmas, let us keep the light of Christ in our hearts. Amen.