

Christmas Eve – 2011 – Luke 2:1-20

Grace and peace to each and every one of you from our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

This weekend you all remember, is the weekend where we celebrate, preach, and proclaim the birth of the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Prince of peace, the Word become flesh, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Today we celebrate, preach, and proclaim Jesus Christ, the God-Man, was born in a manger, a place where animals ate; born in a filthy, stinky, stable where sheep, or goats, or cows slept and, I'm sure, relieved themselves from time to time. You see, if you really look and read and think about the birth of this child who changed and continues to change the world, you'll notice how his birth was anything but sentimental. But that's what we tend to prefer, we like a domesticated God, a God who does what we want him to do and when we want him to do it. We want our God to be like the farm animals kids sing about in "Old McDonald," or the farm animals we see in every Nativity display or set; a passive, distant God. We want our God to be like the pets we cuddle up to at night. We want a God who is nice, who makes us feel better about ourselves, who comes rushing to our aid only if, IF!, we need him. We want the God that Bette Midler sings about who watches us "from a distance." Or, as the Rascal Flatts famously sang, we want the God who simply "blessed the broken road" that leads us to straight to someone who is or might be the love of our life.

And the reason I say all of that is because during this time of year it's so easy to become all sentimental, it's so easy to get filled with all these warm and fuzzy feelings and emotions, that we lose sight of why God came down to us in Jesus Christ in the first place. Now, there's nothing wrong with getting the "warm and fuzzies," but when Christmas becomes all about that instead of about Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came to redeem all of creation, who came to

set free the oppressed, who came to pour out forgiveness on sinners like us, who came to not only been born in a wood feed box but also came to die on a wooden cross for us: When Christmas is just about feeling good, instead of remembering and celebrating how God became man in human history, to breathe the air we breathe, to feel the grass and dirt and gravel beneath his feet that he himself created, we might as well call tomorrow not Christmas day or today Christmas eve; we might as well call today “Sentimental Eve” and tomorrow “Sentimental Day.”

What Christmas is also about, something we often forget, is that God was so sick and tired of the messes people made of their lives or of other people’s lives that God set about to do what He promised way back in Genesis: To have His Son come and redeem and resurrect and give hope a world full of misery and death and hopelessness. God himself promised to do and did things His own way. But why? In Scripture you’ll notice that God sent warning after warning to his people Israel to repent from turning away from Him and to false gods. Time and time again those people turned a deaf ear to this God of theirs. They refused to listen to what God had to say to them. They refused to listen to the prophets God sent to them, running some out of town, throwing stones at other. They refused to listen to their God who commanded them to care for the poor, the weak, the sick, the widows, and the orphans. And just because we’re Gentiles, that is not Jewish, we’re not off the hook either. I’m guessing many of you are of European stock, and what our ancestors were so well known for before the Gospel came to them was idolatry, having false god upon false god. And if you want a proof of that read any history book or read the first 3 chapters in St. Paul’s letter to the Romans. Jew and Gentile, you and me, we’re all under the wrath of God.

So for us to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, we should first be struck with nothing but fear and a chill should run up our spine each and every December. Because Jesus Christ, you will remember is God himself in person, Emmanuel – “God with us.” He is the Incarnation of God – incarnation meaning simply “God-with-flesh-on.” So for God himself to come to this earth, to be borne by the Virgin Mary, means first and fore mostly that there was and is something so fundamentally wrong not only with the world we work and live in, but also , if we want to be completely honest with ourselves, there is something so fundamentally wrong with us too. You don’t even need me or any other preacher to tell you that. We already know it, and we feel it in the pit of our stomachs, and it stings. We feel it at the bottom of our hearts, and those hearts of ours ache. This isn’t some sort of new revelation though. We already know that about ourselves and we already know it about the world we live in.

But this world you and I live and work in is exactly the place where God himself decided to come. God came down to this world where people are always at each other’s throats, trying to bring down whoever it is that’s ahead of them or might be better off than them. God came down to this world where wars rage, where people mistreat others night and day, where the most important people we know are me, myself, and I. God came down to this world that is and will always be hostile against him. God came down to this world that is full of sin, sorrow, and sadness; that is full of disillusionment, hopelessness, and pain; that is full of broken promises, hatred, and bigotry. God came down to this world that would rather have no God at all.

You see, that’s why it so important that we don’t water down this story, this fact of history of God becoming man in Jesus Christ. That’s why it’s so important that we don’t sentimentalize it

and make it say whatever it is we want it to say. This God we have is not a domesticated or tame God. This God we have is a passionate and a jealous God who has been mocked, made fun of, and swore and cursed at for thousands of years. But that doesn't stop him from coming to us. This God we have does not sit waiting on the sidelines. No, this God we have gets in our face, gets in our ears, gets in our brain, gets in our heart, gets into the pits of our stomach and says, "Well, here I am. What are you going to do now?"

The most important part from our Gospel reading from St. Luke is the verse where the angel of God gives some poor and dirty shepherds this promise: "to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." This verse is the most important verse because not only was that promise meant for those shepherds, but that promise is meant for us too. In that promise we hear that this God of ours was not born to show us more of God's wrath. This child was born "to you," for you, for me, for all people as the Savior, as the Messiah, as the Lord. So in Jesus Christ you can see how God is a passionate God for you. In Jesus Christ you see how God is a jealous God for you. He wants you all for himself. In Jesus Christ we see the one and only God who takes seriously everything that is wrong in this world, everything that is wrong with you, me, how we treat ourselves and others.

There's very little that is sentimental about this child, Jesus. He was born for you. He was born so that all the wrath of God would not be poured out on you or me, but that all the wrath of God would be poured out on himself. All of the anger and hatred, all of the sin, sorrow, and sadness, all the disillusionment, hopelessness, pain, and all of the broken promises you, me, and every single person that has lived or ever will live made, all of that God does not hold against us

because we have this Jesus Christ, the child who was once wrapped in bands of cloth, the man who was once wrapped in bands of cloth when he was buried 30 or so years after his birth, we have this Jesus Christ who came give his life as a sacrifice for all people, for you and for me. And as the Bible says, “Greater loves has no man, than to lay his life down for his friends.” He came to give of himself, and he came to give himself wholly and completely to us, for us, for you and for me. In Jesus Christ we find how God is gracious, how God is forgiving, how God is full of love and compassion. In Jesus Christ we find the one and only God who promises and gives redemption and salvation and new life freely to all who believe in him.

People of God, there are some things far grander and far more powerful at work in this world than you and I could even imagine. There is this God of ours at work in this world, a God who is absolutely relentless in pursuing you and me until we finally give up, lose everything we think that gives us life or makes us feel better about ourselves. We have an untame God, a wild and passionate God who will stop at nothing to get through our thick skulls and hearts of stone, that come what may, be it sin, death, or hell itself – God will not abandon those he loves even if those he loves, try as you may, tries to abandon him. Jesus Christ is, you will remember, Emmanuel, God with us. He was born for you. He died for you. He saves you from sin and death. He is the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord. It’s as simple as that.

The only thing left for you to do, if you haven’t done this already, is say to yourselves, “God did all that for me.”

God’s peace and mercy be with each and all of you today, tomorrow, and always. Amen.