**CHRISTMAS EVE, 12/24/21**

**SERMON**

**LUKE 2:1-14 (15-20)**

Christmas is a story of journeys.

It is a time when people journey to be with family and friends

 for the great Celebration.

Planes, trains, and buses are full, and cars pack the highways.

All because people are willing to travel

 so they can spend the holidays together.

Journeys are an important part of Christmas.

Even the children often make a journey to the front of the church

 to participate in a Christmas Pageant.

David and Helen were happily married and wanted to have children.

But nothing was happening.

So they prayed to the Lord.

And he gave them 4 children in 4 years.

When the children were still 5 years old and younger,

 they were the stars of the Christmas pageant.

Joyce, their 4-year-old daughter was playing Mary,

 Stephen and John were Shepherds,

 and their youngest son, Mark, was a Wiseman.

Proud and excited they gathered with the other children

 as they journeyed to the makeshift stable, near the altar for the pageant.

John had practiced his line over and over:

“We found the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes.”

But looking at the audience, he was nervous and said,

“The baby was wrapped in wrinkled clothes.”

Joyce playing Mary, put her hands on her hips and declared:

 "That's not wrinkled clothes.

 It's dirty, rotten, clothes."

Then a wrestling match broke out between Mary and the Shepherd.

It was stopped by an Angel, who bent her halo, and lost her left wing.

Finally, Mark stepped forward wearing a bathrobe and a paper crown,

 knelt reverently at the manger and announced:

 "We are the three wise men,

 and we are bringing gifts

 of gold, common sense, and fur."

The congregation dissolved into laughter, and the pageant got a standing ovation.

The Pastor was laughing and wiping tears from his eyes, as he said:

“I've never enjoyed a Christmas program as much as this one,”

 for the rest of my life, I'll never hear the Christmas story

 without thinking of gold, common sense, and fur."

Then all the children journeyed back to the comfort and safety of their families.

The Biblical story is full of journeys.

Mary and Joseph of course traveled to Bethlehem

 where Baby Jesus would be born.

The Shepherds made an unexpected journey.

The hills of Bethlehem were quiet on that night.

The Shepherds had already settled the flocks,

 and were prepared for a long vigil.

But their calm and quiet night was interrupted by Angels.

When the Angels had left them, they said:

“Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened.”

They didn't say, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see if this is for real"

 They didn't question the message of God.

 They didn't question the announcement of the angels.

 They didn't sit around and think about all the impossibilities."

They left the sheep and journeyed to Bethlehem to see the baby.

Then they returned to their sheep glorifying and praising God,

 for all they had seen and heard.

It was a journey of faith, and mystery, and wonder for them.

There are many more journeys involved in this fantastic event.

Soon the wise men would make their journey to find the new born King.

Their journey wasn't an easy one.

Can you imagine what they went through?

As they were loading their camels for the long journey,

 bystanders probably asked: "What are you doing?"

The Wise men probably replied: "We are getting ready to take a trip."

The neighbors would want to know more:

“Where are you going? Do you have a map?”

They might have said something like:

 "Well, we're not sure where we are going.

 We're going to follow that star.

 We are going to find a king.

 All we know is that we have seen His star,

 and we are going to follow it until it leads us to Him,

 and then we're going to worship Him."

It was a journey of faith, and mystery, and wonder for they them.

There would be many other journeys.

Mary and Joseph would take their child to Egypt for some time

 before returning home.

Their journeys too, would be filled with faith, mystery, and wonder for them.

But there are still other important journeys.

Our journey to the manger is also important.

God invites us to come close to the newborn baby.

He encourages us to get to know Him.

He wants us to follow Him throughout our lives,

 to know He loves and forgives us.

It is an important journey, filled with faith, mystery, and wonder.

Soon we will light our candles, for the final hymn.

Our one small ordinary candle, all by itself, doesn't cast much light.

As small as it is, that one candle

 casts aside the darkness, doubts, and fears in our lives.

It reminds us Jesus is the light of the world.

And that gives us hope.

In a short time, we will have to return to the difficulties of our lives,

 health issues, financial worries, loneliness, doubts, fears,

 problems which will not go away on their own.

But we are no longer all alone.

We are loved, cherished, and forgiven.

We do not have to bear it all on our own,

 Jesus has the ability to carry us through the tough times.

As we look around we will see many small candles,

 lighting up the entire sanctuary,

 and we realize we help and encourage each other.

Each of us holding the light of Jesus in our hearts.

The light reminds us of the meaning of Christmas.

AMEN