

Church of the divine Love

Sermon Christmas Eve December 24, 2024

Isaiah 9: 2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2: 1-14 (15-20).

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

The announcement has been made and the news delivered. Today God has come to us as a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. **(Luke 2:1-20)** Emmanuel. God is with us.

The angel calls this good news of great joy for all people. Not just for the shepherds but for all people. That means you and me too. It doesn't matter who you are, why you are here, what you do or do not believe, what has or has not happened in your life, or what you've done and left undone. This good news of great joy is for you, me, and all people. It's the same announcement every year. We heard it last year, the year before that, and the one before that. It never changes. It's the same announcement every year.

For a lot of years, I used to come to this night wanting to say something new, original, and profound. But the longer I live and the more of life I experience the more I come to this night just wanting to hear the same old good news, the same old announcement. I come to this night wanting to look into the manger of my life and find the child wrapped in bands of cloth lying there. I want to be reminded that Christmas is still true and still happening. I want to hear the same old story again for the first time. And it's not because I think the story has changed since last year. It's because my world and life have changed over the last year. It's because I have changed over the last year. I suppose that's true for you too.

So, with every intention of telling, you what you already know let me just say this: "A child has been born for us." **(Isaiah 9:6)** He is "wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." **(Luke 2:12)**. His manger, however, is not in Bethlehem. We are the manger in which the child is born. After all, what good is it to us if he is laid in a manger in Bethlehem if he is not also laid in the manger of our lives? What can this child possibly do for us? What can this little one who cannot yet talk, walk, or take care of himself offer us? Start with the manger of your life. What's the good news of great joy you need tonight? What is the manger you bring tonight? Are you walking in darkness? This child is the Light of the World. Are you full of confusion or self-doubt? This child is the Wonderful Counselor. Do you feel overwhelmed and powerless? This child is the Mighty God. Are you living with guilt or regret? This child is the Merciful One. Do you hunger? This child is the Bread of Life. Do you thirst? This child is the Cup of Salvation. Is there violence in your life and world? This child is the Prince of Peace. Is your life fragile or unstable? This child is the Chief Cornerstone. Are you lost? This child is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Do you feel disconnected or untethered? This child is the True Vine. Are you afraid, vulnerable, or insecure? This child is the Good Shepherd. Do you need hope? This child is the Alpha and the Omega. Are you dealing with death and loss? This child is Resurrection and Life.

Whatever the manger of your life might be tonight, it is the place in which this child is laid. There are no empty mangers. Tonight, the manger of your life has been filled and joined heaven to earth and earth to heaven. If you are wondering if this child's birth can really change your life let me ask you this. Did the

birth of your child change your life and re-create your world? Did your birth change your parents' lives and re-create their world? Yeah, in more ways than we can count. What is so amazing about this story that two thousand years later we are still telling it? What is so amazing that we come back year after year to hear a story we've already heard and probably know by heart? What about this story amazes you tonight?

I'm not asking about your amazement at what happened to the shepherds, Mary, or Joseph. I want us to push through the sentimentality of the story to its power and meaning for our lives tonight. I'm asking about how this story is amazing for you, in your life and circumstances tonight. I don't want you to tell their amazing story. I want you to tell your amazing story. Is it a story about recovering hope when you thought all was lost, finding freedom and forgiveness of past guilt and regret, or facing and moving through your fear? Maybe it's a story of discovering light, meaning, and direction for your life when you were walking in darkness, or getting your life turned around and going in a new direction. and a thousand others like them is an amazing story of Christmas and they all begin with the child lying in a manger. We come this night to once again receive that child into the manger of our own lives.

It doesn't matter who you are, why you are here, or what has and has not happened in your life the past year, the angel's announcement of "good news of great joy for all the people" is a promise that all of us are given and have an amazing story. And sometimes the most amazing thing about that story is that it is happening even when we don't see it or can't yet believe it. What is the story you would make known about the child? How has that story grown in you? Is it still growing in you? If not, why not? In what ways does it continue to change and challenge you? The amazing story began with the shepherds but it can only continue with us. It is now your story and my story. And in whatever ways it penetrates our hearts, our minds, our emotions, all that we love and hold as dear, it will always be a story that is simply amazing.

Maybe your amazing story is about experiencing peace in a time of turmoil or getting through another day when you didn't think you could even get out of bed that morning. It might be a story about how your life was put back together when you weren't sure if you even had all the pieces. Maybe it's a story about love and intimacy, abundance and gratitude, healing and wholeness. Maybe it's a story about feeling a presence greater than and from beyond yourself. Maybe it's a story about looking in the face of the child lying in a manger and recognizing yourself. Every one of those and a thousand others like them is an amazing story of Christmas and they all begin with the child lying in a manger. We come this night to once again receive that child into the manger of our own lives.

The Christmas story, that amazing story of God with us, does not end with the birth of Jesus. That's when it begins. And it's not simply a story to tell, it's a story to live. Let's vow this night to live that story to its fullest, to open ourselves to the world and word of the shepherds, and to allow our lives, words, and actions to become the story. Don't you want to be amazed and amazing? Merry Christmas. Merry amazing Christmas to all of you. Happy new year and may God bless you! **Amen.**