

Christmas 2017
St. Luke 2:1-20
Isaiah 9:2-7
December 24, 2017
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Emanuel

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.”

I don't know about you, but I need some light. I need Christmas like I have never needed it before. Shine on me, light divine. Show me the way home in the dark of night. Let your light give us hope. Let your light help us to find love, and may love find us.

A recent survey by a reputable polling service [Pew Research Center] last week released the results of a survey of American adults, which showed that the basic beliefs in the Christmas story were on the decline. Somewhere near half the adults in our country no longer believe in the roots and basics of the Christmas Holiday, that is the story you heard read to you from the Gospel of Luke tonight, yet most adults still observe it, no matter their theological beliefs. Just check out the Shopping Malls and you will find a lot of apparent believers rushing about to fulfill their own or someone else's expectations of the holiday.

I am here to say, as you would expect, that I do believe in Christmas, along with the details of the story about how Jesus came into the world.

The main thing I have come to believe in my life is that God did come into the world and became one of us, and that God did that so we would know God is all about love, which somehow, unfortunately, like those of his own day, we have yet to get it, even with his trip to Israel.

The details of his birth, while debated as magical, mythical or at least difficult to believe by some, for me, underscore that this is the God I have come to know and that this was one way God made known God's love to us, from the very start of God's visit.

Now When Presidents and Kings and Queens go visiting in different lands far away, they are treated as beyond first class travelers with the best in accommodations and fancy transportation in limousines with red carpets laid out for them to walk upon to show them honor. Military bands play patriotic music, and soldiers salute the dignitaries. Jets like flying angels are sometimes seen and heard overhead.

Not so with the birth of Jesus. When you talk of humble origins, you can't get more humble than this: His earthly parents were common folk. The Bible goes to great lengths to show how Joseph was descended from King David, but as we can see from his life that did not do Joseph much of any good, and only caused the little family to make the long journey from Nazareth in the North

country, to Bethlehem, just south of Jerusalem. That his forbearer was King David would only have gotten him a Venti Coffee at St. Arbucks for \$2.79 along the way.

They did not travel to the city of Jerusalem, the religious and political capital of Israel, but rather to a small, “backwater” town. They might have been noticed if they wanted to be up there with the politicians and religious leaders, but nothing so glorious as the pomp and circumstance of a great or not so great leader arriving.

They arrived without any detail to protect them, no chariots, not a sedan chair to carry the pregnant mother of Jesus. –Just a humble donkey. Joseph likely made the journey on foot. Try walking from here to Danbury on foot. Try riding a donkey for that distance on uneven rocky roads, in weather that was cold, over and through territory that was uninviting and sometimes dangerous, plagued by robbers who did not discriminate over their victims. But God watched over them in their journey to Bethlehem and delivered them safely to the door of the Inn: Only to find that there was no room at the Inn. No bed and breakfast. No cheap motel. Not a room in the village for them. Miles and miles of travel, and after all of this hardship, they come to a strange place only to find themselves homeless. The God of the Universe will be born in a small town, whose name will go down in History because of these simple events there this evening. He was born in a cave, behind the Inn, which was used in those parts as a shelter for animals. In fact, their feeding trough was his first crib where he would be laid down in the food meant for the animals. The technical term for this animal-feeding trough was “manger.” Sounds nicer than the hay lined box where God came to rest as he took his first breaths of the cold night air, sheltered from the winds coming off the desert wilderness surrounding them.

Ordinary hardworking people were nearby the town, just outside in the farm fields, tending to their work, which was to watch over a flock of sheep. And these unnamed folk, unremarkable yet remarkable people were the first to hear of this great news. Angels broadcast it to them. They heard the news and believed it, and were so excited, they went into Bethlehem to see it for themselves. It was just as they were foretold it would be, and they fell down on their knees in awe of this special child, God come into the world. Wouldn't you?

And of course, there was told of a bright star shining overhead, which marked the spot where God entered the world. Why not? If this was God coming into the world, couldn't God have appointed a star to shine light upon the happenings down on earth? I believe so. And wise astrologers in far-away lands saw the star too, and came and followed it until they too found the place where the child lay, and they came to also understand the worldly import of this great event, offering gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

And this great God came among us: the common, ordinary, simple folk. This is our Christmas present, in the words of Hymn 74:

“Blessed is the King whose coming is in the name of God!
For Him let doors be opened, No hearts against him barred!
Not robed in royal splendor, nor in power and pomp comes he;
But clad as are the poorest, such is his humility.
Blessed is the King whose coming is in the name of God!

He offers to the burdened the rest and grace they need.
Gentle is He and humble! And light his yoke shall be.
For he would have us bear it so he can make us free!”

God came into the world to show us God’s love in a way it could no longer be questioned. Accept this free gift of love and your life will be changed forever for the good. This is the precious gift of Christmas. This is what has melted human hearts for centuries. God came to people like us: The other 99% who are not famous, nor rich, but faithful, good hard working people known mostly to God and those they love and who love them. These are simple folk, like the shepherds keeping watch in the field by night. You who hear and read this good news are the chosen ones of God. The gift of Christmas is yours!

So here it is, another Christmas. Here on this dark night a light has come into our world, into our lives, and into our hearts.

“For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. “Emanuel! God with us! Amen