



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

December 30, 2012

Christmas 1

Sermon Text: [Luke 2:1-20](#)

Pastor Eric Hansen

First Lesson: [Isaiah 9:6-7](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 111](#)

Second Lesson: [Hebrews 2:14-18](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 1:1-14](#)

Christmas

Brothers and sisters in Christ:

Christmas as a child equaled fun. It meant time off from school. It meant some time to actually sleep in. It meant time to get together for presents, for family, for friends. It was a blast. Now we are getting older. Now as adults we finally realize that behind the scenes, our parents were doing a lot of work. I have to tell you that when I asked my wife the things she'd been up to the last couple of weeks, it made my head spin. I felt a little bit bad that I hadn't been more involved. All the shopping that was going on, the cleaning, all the presents, the Christmas cards, all those other things wrapped up in the season of Christmas. It makes my head spin. Even more so when I consider all the things that we are normally involved with during the rest of the year. It causes stress, worry, not to mention some arguments when you finally get together with those family members.

I wonder what you feel about this season of Christmas. It used to be so great, right? I can remember growing up as a child loving the Christmas Eve service, being able to be up in front sharing the little part that I had memorized. Then afterwards jumping into a station wagon heading down the hill, going to my house with my grandparents, my mom and dad, my sister, myself, and just tearing open presents. It was fun. But now, now I have to say I'm kind of glad that it's over because it was so busy and so hectic. Finally I can get back to my routine. I wonder if you feel the same way?

I start to wonder, what is this Christmas supposed to be about? With all these other trappings that we've included, traveling, presents, friends, family, have we missed the main point?

Of course, you know what the main point is all about. You're members here at Zion. You've heard about it. You've seen the nativity as you came in. It's about Christ. I think maybe we've heard it so many times that we've glazed over its true meaning. This morning we get an opportunity to review, to refresh, to hear the Luke 2 account one more time, but to listen to it as if you were hearing it the first time. Do you remember how it goes?

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took

place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

I'm sure you've heard that account before. Maybe you've even heard it from your children during the Christmas Eve service this last week. There are a lot of parts of that account that we often glaze over because we're so familiar with it. It's become so common, so normal. I have to tell you, the Christmas cards that we send out with the nativity scene, they don't do it justice. When there is that nice looking little barn and you have Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus, everything is so clean. There's a halo around their heads. They're glowing. Is that what you heard in the story that I just shared with you? No. Jesus was laid in a manger. Mangers are the things that animals eat out of. When an animal is eating out of something, you know what he is

also doing... going to the bathroom. No matter how much you clean that out, no matter how much new fresh straw you put down, it doesn't get rid of the smell, not completely. That's where Jesus was born. No glowing. No cleanliness. No fancy house. Not even a hospital. Not even a doctor.

You learn something about God's love for us. There is no place he isn't willing to go, even a manger. There's no room, no house that he is not willing to dwell in, even a stable... for us. Can you get a handle on that? This is the Son of God who came to be born in this fashion. The God who in the Old Testament is described as the I AM God, the one who just is, no beginning, no end. The one who in the New Testament who is described as being the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. The God who we read about in John who through whom all things were made, he was born in a manger? This is the God that, just picture yourself taking the fastest space shuttle we can get, out past the moon, out past our solar system, go as far as our space ships could take us and launch another ship and go farther than that to the farthest star, and you would never get to a place that he isn't governing. You would never get to a place where he isn't dwelling. You would never reach a place that he hasn't created. This is God. No mind can conceive, no mind can comprehend the vastness that is God, yet he cares about little old me, enough to be born in this manner, enough to say in [Psalm 139](#), "You created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." All powerful, you are God. All knowing, you are God. Present everywhere, you are God. Perfect in love. Perfect in justice. Perfect in mercy, you are God. Yet he became a child placed in a manger, born in a stable, for you, for me. Love that knows no bounds.

[Philippians 2](#) puts it this way: "Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant." That is Christ's love for you.

I guess Christmas is not just for children, not just for those presents that we hand to one another and that we stress out about so much, but Christmas is about God's present to us, his present to adults, his present to children, a present first gifted to Mary so long ago.

There has been a lot said about Mary throughout the years of church history. Many things go beyond what Scripture says about Mary. Mary herself recognized when she was announced to be having the child that was to save the world that she herself needed that Savior. She said in [Luke 1:46-47](#), "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Revelations is also pretty clear that you are only supposed to pray to and give glory to God, so we don't praise Mary in the same way we praise God. We don't pray to her. But we should honor her. We should respect her as a godly woman who received one of the most crazy tasks in history. Ladies, think about what this would be like.

Ladies, consider you are 14 or 15, you receive this messenger from God, an angel, that says "You are going to have a child without a man. You are going to raise this child." Then you consider going about doing this task and then raising this child only to see him at the cross. She was at the foot of the cross, only to watch him die. Then later on to put your faith in him as your Savior. That's crazy. Yet Mary responds, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." What an awesome woman. In a world with two few examples of what being a godly woman is all about, in steps Mary, somebody who hears about this impossible path that lay before her but looks to God's promise for strength on that journey. That Christmas present was for her, that child born in the manger.

That Christmas present was also for Joseph. Joseph is also an example of a godly man, not a perfect man, but a godly man. Somebody that we could honor and that we could emulate. He was a man who was willing to walk the walk and talk the talk. So gentlemen, consider what it would be like to be in his shoes. Consider you are engaged to somebody, and that woman that you love, that you've been engaged to, says that she's pregnant. And you, being a godly man, have not slept with her before marriage, so you are wondering what is going on, and she says it's an angel? Give me a break. That's never happened. Yet, Joseph shows he is a godly man who has respect for this woman. He doesn't want to make a big scene. He doesn't want to get her in trouble. He had in mind to divorce her quietly. He had respect for her even though in his mind she did something that should not be done.

Then Joseph gets a messenger from God. An angel talks to him and says that this whole story that Mary has is actually real. This child was born a miracle of virgin birth. Joseph takes that message and he believes it. So in a world where we have too few examples of being a godly man, in steps Joseph, somebody who loves and respects this woman and is willing to do what it takes to take care of that family. In steps Joseph, one who is willing to listen to God and his message. He didn't shake that dream from the angel off as just something he ate. He listened to God's message as crazy as it sounded. Then finally, he even listened to the government. When they asked him to go to Bethlehem, a long trip with a pregnant wife.

So we see Christmas. It does have to do with a present... God's present to us, being born in such a humble manner. It does also have to do with family. But not the family that we only see once a year because we can only handle them once a year... the family that was around the Christ child, Mary and Joseph, a family that we too could emulate.

Christmas was about those things. It was also about friends... the shepherd friends, the ones who heard a host of angels that filled the sky. A host, that's an army of angels. In the postcards it's often pictured as angels with trumpets. They were probably dressed for war, praising God and saying, speaking out loud, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to men on whom is favor rests!" Those shepherds were shaken. Yet when they heard the comforting message that this was going to be a Savior, when the angels said, "Do not be afraid. This is good news," they calmed down. They had

peace. They were excited enough to go and find out this good news that they had heard about. When they arrived at the stable, the place where Christ was laying as a baby in a manger, we don't hear Mary hustling about the house making sure that everything was clean and tidy. We don't see her trying to bake up some cookies real quick. We don't hear Joseph trying to make some chairs so everybody would be comfortable. They don't need all those other things because they are focused on the promise, fulfilled in this child, in amazement, wondering what this could mean for their lives.

Christmas is about a gift... the Christ child. Christmas is about a family... Mary and Joseph. Christmas is about friends... those shepherds who came, honoring this good news.

At a time where we kind of glaze over and have become too familiar with Christmas, I hope this helps to remind you how much your Lord loves you. I don't know that we would be willing to do this for somebody that we actually know let alone people who have sinned against us, but God did that for you.

One more time, just think about what it would be for God to be born in a manger. Just think about what we've been given. Could I actually have you raise your hand if you have a house that has more than three rooms. I'm not just counting bedrooms. Raise your hand if you have a kitchen, a living room, a dining room, a bathroom. Do you have indoor plumbing? Isn't that a blessing? Hot and cold water? How many of you would be willing to give all that up to live in a house that was very simple, that would have an upstairs room to sleep in, a downstairs courtroom that was outside, and a cellar where you would keep your animals. I don't know, maybe the most adventurous among us would be willing to give that up, but I'm willing to bet we'd get sick of it really soon because it's not what we would be used to. But God in heaven was born in a manger. A simple story, yet profound at how God could wrap himself in flesh. Simple enough that even our children can understand. A 4-year-old can say, "Yes. Jesus was born on Christmas day. It's his birthday. And he lived a perfect life. He did what was right and gave it up on a cross. He rose. The tomb was empty so that I am going to rise." It's so simple a child can understand, yet so profound that we can ponder it year after year.

May this message of Christmas walk with you tonight as you go out, walk with you throughout this year that it wouldn't be put on the shelf marked "December 25" or "the Christmas season," but it would be part of you every day. For those moments when the devil would tempt you to think that God can't do the miraculous, for those moments when you would be tempted that God isn't loving and he doesn't have a good plan for you, remember, he loved the world enough to give his only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. When that Christmas message is on your mind, it will indeed be a Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year. May God bless you in this. Amen.