

Christmas Celebration
Northshore Church
12/25/2022

In my mind, the classic and most iconic telling of the Christmas story, and the version read by Linus in the Peanuts Christmas Special, is found in the Gospel of **Luke**. I'll share with you what is written in **chapter 2, verses 1-20**.

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 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.

5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,

7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

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

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

15 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."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

20 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 think it's important for us to remember that a very real human struggle took place behind the scenes of this beautiful story.

Let's consider together the words found in **Matthew chapter 1, verses 18-21.**

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about : His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Jesus was God incarnate, born into this world for one reason, "to save his people from their sins." As God's people, we must never forget that our salvation came at a cost; the cruel cross on which that babe born in a manger bled and died.

Christ's birth was a miracle. And it's important for us to note that, while there are many miracles recorded in scripture, this one is unique. Most of the miracles we see recorded in scripture are the work of God in a specific set of circumstances for a specific person or group of people. The miraculous birth of Christ to the Virgin Mary was a miracle that was intended by God to be a blessing to all people. And you can take that personal. In his infinite wisdom and perfect knowledge of all things, God knew you were among those who would receive the miracle of the Messiah's birth. In a few months, we will celebrate Easter and reflect on the Cross and the Resurrection. Today we celebrate and remember the miracle that gives the Cross meaning and made the Resurrection God's final word on our sin.

It is my hope that you received or will receive many wonderful gifts this Christmas season. Some gifts are more meaningful than others. A gift is more than material gain. It represents the heart of the giver for the recipient of the gift. We are tempted to measure the value of gifts as a function of cost, literally or figuratively. Sometimes cost is relative to the resources of the giver, but all gifts cost the giver something of value. Another way we might examine the value or meaning of a gift is by looking at the relationship between the giver of the gift and the recipient. The more intimate the relationship between giver and receiver, the more meaningful the gift. A humbling part of receiving a great gift from someone who knows us well is the fact that we are receiving a blessing from them even though they know us well enough to be aware of our faults. It's not always at the front of our mind as we tear open the wrapping paper, but every gift is an

expression of the willingness to forgive. And forgiveness sometimes costs the giver even more than the most extravagant gift. God gave us the gift of his son without reservation. His gift cost Him more than we can imagine, and he gave it for you and me even though he knows all our shortcomings.

As we reflect on that manger scene and visualize a baby laying in a feeding trough surrounded by animals and Mary and Joseph, I want to challenge you to think about the birth of Jesus in a way that may not have occurred to you. I want us to take a few moments to examine ourselves and think about the worst things we have done. Because God knew the worst things about you and me when he gave his son. God's response to our sin is the gift of Jesus.

We have considered together a somber truth about the Christmas story. God sent his son, they called him Jesus. He bled and died to take away our sin. It's something we should not forget or take for granted. But it is not God's intention that we spend all of our time in serious reflection. He inhabits our reverence and humility, and he inhabits our joy and celebration. We do not want to leave God behind at the end of this service, or at the door of the church when we depart each Sunday morning. We're not done with God because we fulfilled our duty to come to Church on Sunday, and he's not done with us.

As a final word this morning, I would like to share a Christmas prayer from the Common Book of Prayer. The words sound kind of old fashioned, and they are. These are words that have marked the celebration of Christmas by English speaking Protestant believers for almost 500 years.

Reading from Common Book of Prayer

The Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas Day

O God, who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of thy only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that as we joyfully receive him for our Redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold him when he shall come to be our Judge; who liveth and reigneth with the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end, Amen.