

Christmas Eve 2022

Luke 2:1-20

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Ever since I was old enough to remember there has been one movie I must watch each Christmas – *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. You know the story. Grinch, whose heart is too small, could not tolerate the Christmas celebration of the citizens of Whoville. So, he devised a plan, “a great Grinchy trick” to prevent Christmas from coming. He swooped in on his sleigh under the cover of night and “took every present! Pop guns! And bicycles! Roller skates! Drums! Checkerboards! Tricycles! Popcorn! And plums! ... He took the Who’s feast! He took the Who-pudding! He took the roast beast! ... Why, that Grinch even took their last can of Who-hash!” To put his plan into action, the Grinch needed a reindeer to pull his sleigh. Seeing none he said, “If I can’t find a reindeer, I’ll make one instead.” Enter Max, the Grinch’s jovial pup dog and my favorite character, to play the part of the reindeer. And, in the words of the late broadcaster Paul Harvey, “You know the rest of the story.”

We gather tonight and every Christmas Eve to hear another story we know so well with a plan of its own. This one is not about taking, but all about giving. It is God’s plan, and it is full of “good tidings of great joy” for all people.

Most notably of all, the good news of God’s faithfulness and redemptive work. The good news that God came down to be among all of creation, all people. This is Immanuel, “God with us.” A few weeks back, the confirmation youth unpacked just what this incarnational reality of God in Jesus meant. So often, we consider Jesus’ divine nature. He was/is God as the prologue to John’s gospel informs us, which we will read later as we light our candles. While not forgetting about his human nature, he lived so long ago that it’s all too easy to wonder what Jesus has to do with us/me? How do I connect to this child in a manger born 2,000 plus years ago?

Well, as those youth discovered through unpacking dozens of Bible passages Jesus has much to do with us. He was as human as you and I. He had parents, who he needed to care for him. Mary lovingly swaddled him just minutes following his birth. While not located in the Bible, we can assume the young Jesus fell chasing or being chased by his brothers James, Joses, Simon and Judah or his sisters (Mark 6:3). And it was Joseph or Mary that tended to his scraped knee, wiped away his tears and comforted him as any loving parent or guardian does. Those verses also revealed Jesus ate (Mark 2:15), he was taken to the Temple by his parents to learn about God (Luke 2:41-46), he was baptized by John the Baptist (Mark 1:9-11), he was tempted (Mark 1:13), he prayed (Mark 1:35), he slept (Matthew 8:24), he went to a wedding (John 2:1-2), he got angry (John 2:13-15), he proclaimed the good news (Mark 1:14), he forgave (Luke 23:34), he loved and was loved (John 11:5,36), he wept (John 11:35), he was betrayed (Luke 22:1-6), he even felt forsaken (abandoned) by God (Mark 15:34) and he died (Mark 15:37). And of course, there is one more thing this child born in a manger would do. He was risen [from the dead] (Mark 16:6). Yet again, he gave so that we might receive. New life. Abundant and eternal life. This is good news.

Jesus' life revealed just how intimately God desires to be in relationship with humanity. Through the boundaries he crossed socially, physically, geographically, and culturally reveals how God's plan in the reconciling work of Jesus extends to all people. God's abundant love is for the world. These are "great tidings of good news."

This story, surreal at times, offers another component of good news. While certainly God could have acted alone to carry out this plan of kingdom revelation and salvation, God elected not to. God's plan involved the work of humanity. God needed Mary to carry the Christ-child to birth. God needed Joseph to connect him to the lineage of David and keep true to God's covenantal promise that a King of the house of David will forever reside on that throne. Jesus is that king. He is the embodiment of that promise. God needed Joseph to lead the holy family into Egypt to protect the Christ child from the Roman Emperor. God needed those shepherds in their fields keeping watch over their flock by night invited by the angel to go and see this thing that had come to pass that the Lord had made known to them. God worked through those shepherds to make known abroad what they heard and saw. God repeatedly acts alongside humanity. God's plans involve humanity. God works through God's people. Recollect Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, David, the disciples and the 70 Jesus sent alongside them. Recollect the Samaritan woman at the well, or how about Simon of Cyrene who carries Jesus' cross. Or how about Paul, once a persecutor of early Christians, but then chosen by God to carry the message to Gentiles and bring many to hear the "good tidings of great joy." The good news is that God calls and invites humanity to participate in God's work. Jesus needed the assistance of many throughout his life and that continues today.

Jesus needs us. He needs you. To hear and receive, via the Holy Spirit, the "good tidings of great joy" and then to be sent with the shepherds to go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere, that Jesus Christ is born. He needs you to be his hands and his feet. He needs you to be his voice. He needs you to be filled and fed through the gift of his body and blood, filled with his light and his love, and then go be light to the world. He needs you to go with the women at the empty tomb and tell the world, "He is risen. Alleluia." Jesus needs you, just as you are. Go, good people and sing! Let all your songs employ the Savior reigns. Repeat the sounding joy and show forth the wonders of his love.

Merry Christmas priesthood of all believers! Merry Christmas communion of saints! Merry Christmas wonderful, faithful, amazing servants of Christ and children of God! Amen!