

Emmanuel  
Luke 2:1-20  
Christmas Eve 2018  
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Luke 2:1-20 (NRSV) **The Birth of Jesus**

**2** In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** All went to their own towns to be registered. **4** Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. **5** He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

**The Shepherds and the Angels**

**8** In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** Then an angel of the Lord stood before 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; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: **11** to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,<sup>[a]</sup> the Lord. **12** This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,<sup>[b]</sup> praising God and saying, **14** “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”<sup>[c]</sup>

**15** When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” **16** So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. **17** When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; **18** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. **20** The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

We have been preparing, here at PPUMC, through Advent for tonight and have touched on what it means that God started a mission to be with and love and save humanity...and restore the world to what God created it to be.

We’ve talked about hope, which I believe has been a part of God’s plan since the first moments of Creation. And that God’s plan included the Divine Provision to lead us humans out of darkness and back into God’s light.

We talked about God’s love – the undying, untiring, unwavering love that allowed Jesus to come so that we **could be** restored into our relationship with God.

And don't forget the Shalom peace of God. Shalom is a gift. It is also a WHO gift – from the Prince of Peace. Jesus said, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.”* Gift and gift-giver are all rolled into Emmanuel – God with us.

And yesterday, we sang “Joy to the world” and saw that the hymn is divided into two sections....verses about Jesus' first coming, as a baby in the manger **and** verses about the Messiah's coming again, as King. Joy! The angels sang it and so do we!

Jesus truly is the reason for the season.

That's NOT just a cute bumper sticker.

Jesus is also the **meaning** of Christmas...and he is the source of all the Advent gifts we explored on this preparation journey.

Gene and I thought we were getting our boxes to the post office in a timely manner....as timely as a couple of pastors in the middle of Advent could do. Gene came home with the receipt with tracking numbers and honestly, we crossed our fingers that the last ones would arrive on time. Honestly, we're still watching for a THAT ONE; and will make a call later to apologize for “Christmas being extended another day or two...”

There's always one, isn't there?

We hope it isn't lost.

We hope the weather doesn't interfere.

But sometimes, as the clock ticks closer to “opening gift time,” there's that reality that Christmas has come but the present didn't.

I remember one year, I was maybe 9 or 10 and Grandpa hadn't called my name to get my gift from under the tree. We'd drawn names at Thanksgiving. Maybe my name had fallen out of the hat.

I wasn't going to say anything; didn't want to make a fuss (yeah, me!) and just as I was about to go to the kitchen to drown my 9 year old sorrows in the special, Christmas eve hot chocolate, my uncle Dougie, stood up and exclaimed, “Geez, I put my gift on top of the frig.” He turned and pulled down, at literally the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, the one...the anticipated one...**my** gift.

I don't remember WHAT the gift was. But I, obviously remember the occasion and how it felt that MY GIFT was really there.

For Mary and Joseph, that night before the FIRST Christmas, it was probably like any other night – for *about-to-be* first time parents in the pangs of labor pains!

- Same-old, same-old for the innkeeper trying to keep their inn managed.
- Same cool and quiet out in the fields for the sheep and their shepherds

For all of Israel it was just “another day.”

They were still hoping for a messiah but nothing in particular said “**THIS IS THE NIGHT!**”

Until...

...that moment.

...that split second when Jesus, Emmanuel-GOD WITH US, drew his first breath.

God was here!

One of us...and SO MUCH MORE!

And Dear Ones, nothing has been the same since.

And tonight we remember that we celebrate that the ORDINARY gave way to the EXTRAORDINARY.

And because Christ came into this messed up world as ONE OF US, we know that, as we study Scripture, that he didn't just come to share what we live every day, but to provide a better way....and to encourage us to know that God DID create us to live in a different way...and that the brokenness and pain that's all around us should be, instead, our lives mingled with beauty and joy.

God provided Jesus to do that.

God provided power for us which we experience with the presence of the Holy Spirit **in** us.

My Gram, mom's mom, was an Emily Post protégé. Really. She's the one that taught me about which fork to use and even more importantly, the real value of thank you notes. I don't recall, but I'm sure I sent Uncle Dougie a thank you note for that “can't remember what it was” gift that Christmas years ago.

It's a good response to gifts, right?

Well, as we celebrate Jesus' arrival we have responses to give, too. Not just our worship and joy and thanks, there's a lot at stake, not just in our world.

God sent the greatest gift, the One about whom our thanks will increase if we include these responses.

Will we be the one who shares with another about God's son, Jesus Christ? We will be the one that reaches out to broken people, like we are, to tell how we've been redeemed and changed because of God's love?

Or will we slowly blend into society and the world to the point that there is no difference?

Will we be agents of God's change?

Or will we allow ourselves to be drawn further away, by the world, away from God's created intention?

The situation would resemble the critique of Jeremiah:

*They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious.*

*'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace.*

*Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct?*

*No, they have no shame at all;*

*They do not even know how to blush.*

*(Jeremiah 6:14-15)*

Tonight IS a joyous night of celebration, don't get me wrong.

But, it's also a good night for remember that Jesus didn't come into the world to affirm our brokenness, but to expose it to grace.

He didn't give his life on the cross to excuse our sin, but to forgive it.

He didn't rise from the dead to preserve the status quo, but to break open the way to a new heaven and a new earth.

The whole point of Christmas is God becoming human...of God WITH us...of Emmanuel is so that we can be changed to become more like the WHO God created us to be.

Don't be discouraged, Dear Ones, from *RECEIVING and saying thanks to God for the possibilities of healing and redemption and change!*

*"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."*

All the gifts are here.

Everything leading up to tonight's celebration took place so that the HOPE of a promised Messiah could be fulfilled.

...so that the LOVE, written about in John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."*

...and the Prince of Peace could begin to share the gift of SHALOME wholeness to all of us...

...and JOY could be released in the world.

Because Jesus has come, God **IS** with us and we can look confidently into the future when he will come again and reunite us with the fullness and perfection in the completion of Creation.

"Glory to God in the highest!"

And thank You, God, that You are truly and faithfully and always with us.

Will you please be blessed by the choir's 2<sup>nd</sup> anthem of quiet thanks!