

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Nativity of Our Lord - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalm 96

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

12/24/2018

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

1In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph 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. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And 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.

8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am

bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

15When 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.” 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Nativity of Our Lord

Good evening! Welcome to worship on this most wonderful of nights in the church year.

In fact, this whole “holiday” season is characterized by generosity and good will towards those

around us. It seems that every year around this time we dig a little bit deeper, try to be a little bit more patient, and just generally be our best.

This was driven home for me the other night when Megan and I watched the 2017 film *The Man Who Invented Christmas*.¹ It's on Amazon Prime right now and it's loosely based on the process that Charles Dickens went through as he wrote his famous work *A Christmas Carol*. It's a great film, it leaves you feeling all warm and bubbly. Charles Dickens is forced to deal with the demons of his past as well as the attitude of most of London that seems to have all but forgotten the joy that should be extended during this wonderful time of year. The film ends with a few words about what the story did after its release on December 19, 1843. Supposedly charitable giving skyrocketed overnight! One of the best parts of the film, and I'm not really giving anything away, because if you haven't heard how *A Christmas Carol* ends, I don't know what to tell you, is the struggle that Charles Dickens has with coming to grips with the understanding that people can change, can Ebenezer Scrooge actually become a better person? How? The struggle of the main character is mirrored by Charles' own struggle to understand his relationship with his father and whether Charles has the ability to change. The film ends with all things being righted, Scrooge turning away from his evil past, and the meaning of Christmas is restored, goodness prevails!

There's only one problem... the story is wrong. By wrong, I mean when it comes to the meaning of Christmas. While giving, charity, and good-will are all wonderful things, they're no more the meaning of Christmas than the giving of Easter eggs being the point of Easter.

Christmas isn't about you or me at all. It's about God. I've said it before and I'll say it again, my

¹ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6225520/?ref_=nv_sr_2

pastor growing up drilled into my head that the message of scripture when shared in a sermon should always make God the subject of the active verb. It's God's activity that is the focus of this season, because it's the birth of a child that makes all this possible!

The story of Christmas is a story that began a long time ago. It began with the creation of the world, it's a story that takes us to Abraham and Sarah, to the covenant that is established between them and God. It's the story of God's saving activity for God's people who were trapped as slaves in Egypt. The story continued to Mt. Sinai where the covenant was further established between God and Moses. The story follows different judges, different kings, and many prophets. Throughout time the story traveled, wrapping up new people and different stories, but one thing always remained the same: God's commitment to the whole of God's creation. As time went on, the story took a new shape, revealing the next act to the most unlikely of characters, a young girl, around 12-14 years old who would play a key role in the story that God was telling.

It's pretty amazing when you think about it. God chose to become a human being, taking on flesh, like you and me. On this night we gather together to celebrate the miracle of the amazing birth, to celebrate God in skin, bone, and muscle. God, at the very weakest and most vulnerable. When you read the stories of other middle-eastern gods it's clear that weakness is never part of the equation. Other gods were strong and powerful, not a tiny infant born to parents who were part of the lowest social rung on the ladder. That's just not what a God should do!

I mean think about it, is there anything more vulnerable than a tiny baby? Even looking at all the other creatures on this planet, human babies especially stick out as susceptible to danger. Compared to the animal kingdom it's a story of stark differences. Baby giraffes are able to walk

within a few hours of birth.² Sea turtles hatch and immediately head towards the water to take on the big bad world. Meanwhile, human babies can't even lift their head after birth. One article I read said that it would require a gestation period of 18-21 months just to be at the same level of development as that of a newborn chimpanzee.

And yet for some reason God decided to become a human being. In fact, it's kind of a thing for God to listen and look out for the most vulnerable. Just look at the story in front of us today, God becomes a baby, born to a poor young woman, and who are the first people to find out about this wonderful event? Shepherds! I tell this to everyone every year but it needs to be remembered! Nobody liked shepherds. They were literally the very bottom of the chain in every culture in the middle east. They were the hillbillies, the crazy ones from the mountain country, you know, like West Virginians. And yet the messenger from God appears to these crazy, poor, and strange shepherds to announce that God's activity in the world hasn't stopped, it's been ramped up! God has become like you and I!

It's this miracle that changes so much. By taking on flesh this tiny infant will grow up to shake the very foundation of the Roman empire. The miracle of this birth lays down the groundwork for our salvation. It's within the arms of those new parents that our whole world changes. Because of God's work, we are able to do all those wonderful things *A Christmas Carol* calls us to. When we reflect those qualities the book holds up we do it because it's a response to the even more amazing activity of God. We give because we've been given to. We're full of joy and good cheer because God has made that joy and cheer possible! We spend time with our family not because it's the point of Christmas, but because God made this time together possible!

² <https://www.livescience.com/54605-why-are-babies-helpless.html>

It's God's wonderful activity that has blessed us all, and that, my brothers and sisters, is the true meaning of Christmas. Amen.