

## Luke 2:16-20

16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

This evening we have heard amazing things, a story that is both old and familiar, and yet infinite, with new surprises each time it is told. We have heard the story of the Word become flesh and dwelling among us, of a virgin giving birth in a manger, of good news proclaimed by angels, and a newborn king attended by shepherds. We have sung well-worn carols with joyful hearts. In doing these things we have joined with all of our faith ancestors in witnessing the miracle we celebrate on Christmas, the coming of Christ into the world. And there is little that I could add to this amazing story, and so I will keep my message brief tonight. I promise to try to have you home before the Baptists.

Long before this story of Christmas, this story we have heard well and fully told this evening, there was a promise made. In the beginning was the Word, and all things were made through him, and all things were good. But then, the very first human couple chose their will over God's and the world was broken. Beautiful still, but broken. But even in that first moment, when God stood among God's creation, and felt the curse flying outward to

consume every part of the world, felt the death God never intended for us to know begin to take hold, slowly decaying all that was perfect, in that very first moment, God did not abandon us. Instead, God made a promise to a woman named Eve. God promised that though things were broken now, someday they would be redeemed. Someday, Eve's very own descendant would come and shatter the curse, kill death itself, and restore all that was broken and lost.

For thousands of years people waited. They watched empires rise and fall, sometimes living in abundance, other times crying out from the weight of their oppression and suffering, but always, always, holding onto that tiny flicker of hope, the thread of expectation that was always woven through their story, the promise that someday, someday, Messiah would come and make all things right as God had promised in that very first moment.

Through the years God's people imagined how the story would go, and what sort of story it would be, dreaming much like children do. Surely there would be a grand king, and he'd be handsome and winsome and powerful and good. And of course, it would be an action story, the great king would gather up his army and reclaim his throne and land and lead the people into a golden age.

Then the time for dreaming was over, and all the years of dreaming, hoping, and waiting were over, and God breathed God's story into the world and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Word laid down God's glory freely, choosing to become a human infant and dwell among God's people. God's people who had never stopped being broken, who still chose their will over

God's, who were so caught up in their dreams they would not even recognize when God's promise was finally fulfilled. But none of that mattered. God had promised out of love and God would write this story out of love. God stepped down from God's place in heaven, leaving behind the throne, leaving behind the glory and the power. And if God's very arrival here was not enough, God choose to be born not in a golden palace with servants and wealth and comfort as God's people had dreamed, but born in the rough-hewn manger of the inn where the animals were kept and the only gold was the dried grasses the animals ate. God choose to be attended not by wealthy influential and important families, but by some shepherds, their names forgotten, the smell of the field and their flock still clinging to their dirty clothes. There was no proud king and queen holding the infant Lord, but a teenaged girl and a poor craftsman, Mary and Joseph, poor Jews from the part of Israel no one really liked to admit they were from. God's promise that Eve's descendant would set things right was finally being fulfilled by a virgin who carried the Lord in her womb.

This is the story that God wrote for us, so different than what God's people had imagined for centuries, so different from a story we could've written, and yet so very much greater. We have a God who loves us so that there were no lengths God was unwilling to go to save us, no pain God would not bear, no humiliation too great. And this story, long promised, is for each and every one of us here tonight. It is a story of God's infinite love for us, and it is the single most important story ever told. It is a story that has changed everything.

In a few minutes, we will leave this place and go about whatever Christmas festivities await us; holiday dinners, opening gifts, Hallmark Christmas movies, whatever traditions await. And then, there will be the aftermath. Wrapping paper strewn everywhere, pants suddenly feeling rather tight, maybe you've fallen asleep during one Hallmark movie and woken up during another hours later but not realized for several scenes. We will put away our decorations and our mangers, we will stop singing the Christmas carols, and we will close the book and put it on a shelf, and we will stop telling the story until next year.

But this story is far too important to remain on a shelf until next year. Christ's birth affects every moment of our lives because it means that God loves us and yearns to have relationship with us, so much so that God would be born in a manger just for a chance to be in relationship with us.

This story is too big, too profound, and changes far too much to be put aside, and so I would invite you, when you leave here, to continue to tell the story. Tell the story to yourself, to remind yourself that you are so very loved by God and you are redeemed. Tell the story to your family and friends so that they might never forget that no one is beyond God's love and grace. Tell the story with words, or if those fail, then sing the story as so many have done, like John Newton telling the story of Amazing Grace or Martin Luther telling the story through a Mighty Fortress is our God. Tell the story with your hands, through paintings or craft. Tell the story however you can, for God means for it to be told. God means for you to claim the

story, because it is your story too, the story of God's deep love for you. But most importantly, tell the story in the way that you live your life. Let the story of the Word becoming flesh redeem every moment of your life. Tell the story in the way that you live the story.

Tonight, as you go to your holiday traditions, may you take with you this story of hope and love, of grace beyond all dreaming. No matter what this past year has presented you, no matter what this coming year holds in store, no matter your circumstances, no matter how lost or broken you might feel, may your hearts be full and glad with the story of God's promise fulfilled, of love incarnate. And when the holiday is over, may we not put aside the story until next year. May we tell the story each and every day, in our hearts, with our words, and with our very lives.

Rev. Kate Mauch  
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