

“Peering Into Heaven” Week 4 part 2 of “What’s It All About-Unwrapping the True Meaning of Christmas”

**Presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 12-24-2017 at 7:00pm
at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI**

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah 9: 2 & 6

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Micah 5:2

The Lord says, "Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are one of the smallest towns in Judah, but out of you I will bring a ruler for Israel, whose family line goes back to ancient times."

Luke 2: 1-20

At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown. Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger - there was no room for them to stay in the inn. There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, but the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Savior was born - Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them back 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." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger. When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them. The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.

Can you hear the is a buzz in the air? Maybe you can feel the electricity. As the song states, "in the air there's a feeling of Christmas." it permeates everything tonight. Everything. This is the time of year when nostalgia runs deep. Beloved Christmas is indeed a very Special time.

During the Christmas season, it is easy to forget what is important. The true meaning of Christmas is not found in the wrappings, but in the gift. In the Christmas show "a Charlie brown Christmas" Charlie brown picks out a lonely tree with only a few branches for their Christmas program. When he brings the tree back, everyone mocks him for picking such a terrible tree. It bends over; the needles keep falling off, which in turn makes Charlie brown all the more depressed. And in despair, Charlie brown cries out

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“Isn’t there anyone, who knows what Christmas is all about? It is then, that his friend linus shares these glorious words: “and there were in the same country Shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the lord came upon them, and the glory of the lord shone round about them! And they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, “Fear not! For, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all my people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, which is Christ, the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” and suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising god, and saying, “Glory to god in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will toward men.”

That’s what Christmas is all about, it’s really that simple. When you unwrap everything else. That’s what Christmas is about. It is about the gift. It is about god with us. It is about god coming to touch our lives. Christmas Eve is the time when the membrane between heaven and earth is so thin you can almost see through it. Tonight is the night we measure all time against.” On this one night, GOD chose to come to us in human flesh. Heaven came down. I submit to you that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest love story ever written. I wish with all my heart that everyone would read the gospel in that light. I wish with all my heart that everyone would know and experience the love of our lord and savior. The birth of Christ - Christmas is a classic love story.

Consciously or subconsciously, most people, this time of the year, are truly trying to catch a glimpse of god. Christmas is that one time in the year WHEN many make an extra effort to find real meaning real joy to find real peace in their lives. This is when many people make an effort to look into the heart of god. Imagine the world at the time of Jesus birth. Imagine what Mary saw. The world was very busy. Most people were traveling to their hometowns to register for the census. So much hustle and bustle everyone so very busy. There were so many travelers, that Mary and Joseph find no room. There place is packed!!! My guess is that back then they didn’t take reservations over the phone or online. So it was first come, first served. And with Mary, probably in labor at the time, they were probably one of the late arrivals to Bethlehem. But at least they find a place out of the elements that’s somewhat quiet and private. Mary gives birth to her first son – the savior of the world. But most people really didn’t notice, most people made themselves so busy that they missed the presence of god. It’s not that people are not interested in god. It’s just that most of the people got caught up in their busyness.

The world has not changed much. There is still the hustle and bustle. People are busy. Does that mean that people aren’t interested in god? No. No matter how busy you are, deep down in your soul, there is a desire to look into the heart of god.

Tonight, I want us to set our plans and agendas aside. Stop thinking about the roast, or if you remembered everyone’s gifts. Let’s go to Bethlehem and stand next to Mary. What does she see? Well she sees what every new parent sees. A miracle. She sees life. She sees a tiny, helpless bundle. Yet she sees so much more. And SHE remembers the promises of god. And as she looks into the face of her newborn son, she is staring into the very heart of god. And then the shepherds arrive, AND they tell her what the angel had said to them. They crowd around the manger, and they gaze into the face of that child. And they also see the heart of god. Everything the world needs is right there. The key to understanding god, the key to understanding the meaning of life, THE key to eternity, is right there, lying in the manger.

For a moment I want you to close your eyes. Remember, you are standing next to Mary. She hands this tiny newborn over to you. You hold out your arms and cradle his head. And you too realize that the face you are looking into is the incarnation of the living god, the author of the universe.

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You may not perceive them, but the air is thick with angels. Heaven is trembling with joy. But, as you hold this child, you remember the prophecies. You remember why god came in the form of a human being. You remember that he came so that in his death, he himself would conquer death for us. You cannot help BUT feel a little saddened as you look into the face of this child, knowing all that he will suffer. You carefully hand the baby back to Mary. But before you walk away, you take one last look. What you held in your arms was pure love. The love that goes to great lengths for you. One moment the king of heaven. The next, a vulnerable human being born with the most difficult destiny. Oh, did you almost forget? There’s a hustle and bustle that you left waiting. Right now, does it seem so important?

This year, like every year, millions of people, both children and adults, will open millions of gifts. Some will not fit. Some will be the wrong color. But there is one gift that meets all our needs, one gift that never breaks, or wears out. An appropriate gift for any one of any age. A gift that fills you with joy and peace that passes all understanding and cannot ever be taken away. This child is light in a dark world. On this night, the divine and the human cross paths... when god reached out with very human arms to embrace the world. Christmas is where we find the messiah – fully god and fully human – who takes away the sins of the world. We find that those gathered in his nameeven us here tonight fall within the embrace of that love. Bible “for unto us is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is Christ, the lord.”