

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

December 24, 2025 (Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Eve)
Luke 2:1-20

This Christmas I want to share with you one of my all-time favorite stories. Many of you will remember the great storyteller, Paul Harvey. For many years, at Christmastime, he told this story on his radio show. He said the original author was unknown.

The man to whom I'm going to introduce you was not a Scrooge; he was a kind, decent, mostly GOOD man. He was generous to his family and upright in his dealings with other people. But he just didn't BELIEVE all that incarnation stuff which the churches proclaim at Christmas time. It just didn't make SENSE and he was too HONEST to PRETEND otherwise. He just couldn't SWALLOW the Jesus Story, about God coming to Earth as a man.

"I'm truly sorry to distress you," he told his wife, "but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve." He said he'd feel like a hypocrite. That he'd much rather just stay at home, but that he would wait UP for them. And so he stayed, and they went to the midnight service.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a THUDDING sound...Then another, and then ANOTHER. At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window. But when he went to the front door to investigate, he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. That was what the sound was from. They'd been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for SHELTER, had tried to fly THROUGH his landscape window.

Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. THAT would provide a warm shelter, if he could direct the birds TO it. He quickly put on his coat and boots and tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did NOT come in.

He figured food would entice them in. So he hurried back to the house, fetched bread crumbs, and sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted, wide-open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds IGNORED the bread crumbs, and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow.

He tried CATCHING them, but no luck...He tried SHOOING them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms...Instead, they SCATTERED in every direction, every direction EXCEPT into the warm, lighted barn.

And then he realized that they were AFRAID of him. "To them," he reasoned, "I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can TRUST me...That I am NOT trying to hurt them, but to HELP them. But HOW?" Because any move he made tended to FRIGHTEN them, CONFUSE them. They just would NOT follow. They would not be LED or SHOOED because they FEARED him.

"If only I could BE a bird," he thought to himself, "(if I could be a bird,) and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could TELL them NOT to be afraid. Then I could SHOW them the way to the safe warm barn. But I would have to be ONE of them so they could see, and hear and understand. (I would have to be...ONE of them.)"

At that moment, the church bells began to ring. He stood there silently, for a while, listening to the bells, pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. Then he sank to his knees in the snow.

"Now I understand," he whispered.

And now you know... (what was it he always said?) the REST of the story.

Do you understand WHY that man fell to his knees? Do you see what GOD was UP to in this baby Jesus?

God has written us letters, sent us messengers, EVEN PROPHETS, tried SO MANY TIMES to REACH OUT to us, and we DIDN'T UNDERSTAND. He opened the door wide and turned on the light. He gave us His WORD and made a PATH for us. He feeds us with our daily bread. He even tried SHOOING us in with words of JUDGMENT. But nothing worked. We just "SCATTERED in every direction, EXCEPT into his warm, lighted barn." Finally, God thought, if ONLY I could "be ONE of them, so they could SEE, and HEAR and UNDERSTAND." "But I would have to be...ONE of them."

In the baby Jesus, in the Christ-child, God BECAME ONE of us. God came PERSONALLY to SAVE us. God came in HUMAN form to LEAD us out of the storm.

Friends, the birth of Jesus changed everything. The glorious truth of Christmas is that we don't need to wonder WHERE God is, or what God is LIKE. God is no "strange and terrifying creature." In Jesus, our Emmanuel, God is WITH us. If we want to KNOW God, all we NEED is to look at JESUS. If we want to hear the VOICE of God, we need only LISTEN to JESUS. If we want to be CLOSE to God, we simply COME to JESUS, for he IS GOD WITH US.

This is my prayer for each of you – that you'll LISTEN to Jesus, and BELIEVE him when he tells you that you can TRUST him, and LET him SHOW you the way THROUGH the storm, that you'll FOLLOW him, OUT of the snow, and into HIS warm embrace.

Come inside. And have a Very Merry Christmas. Amen.