

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

Christmas Eve 2020
Luke 2:1-20

(Show Christmas according to kids)

I LOVE KIDS! Kids have a WAY of NOTICING things that WE miss. They said, “I don’t know how they SURVIVED in that barn. Too stinky, too crowded, and uck.” Another said, “And he probably pooped, because the room was very smelly.” We grown ups like to make the manger scene a perfect, warm, glowing moment, but those kids noticed that it WASN’T perfect.

Really, the more we LOOK at this story, the more it doesn’t seem to FIT. Remember the announcement of Jesus’ birth by the angel of the Lord? It came to some SHEPHERDS living out in the fields with their flocks. WHY SHEPHERDS? The shepherds were as COMMON as the sheep they cared for, and NO cleaner. They were the REDNECKS of Judea. WE think of shepherding as a gentle and noble trade, but at the TIME, it was a DESPISED occupation. They were seen as shift, dishonest people who grazed their flocks in OTHER people’s fields. Their sheep kept them so busy that they couldn’t FOLLOW all the ritual hand-washings, rules, and practices that the law required. So people looked DOWN on them.

You would EXPECT that the FIRST announcement of the coming of the Savior, Christ the Lord, into the world would come to RESPECTABLE folks – people that could get the WORD out: you know, LEADERS in the community, somebody people would LISTEN to. But God chose SHEPHERDS. God PLANNED it that way. It SAYS something. God CHOSE the WORST possible messengers.

And what is a MANGER, anyway? It’s a FEED trough. Was a FEEDING trough a place for a SAVIOR? A smelly BARN a place for the Messiah and the Lord? You would EXPECT that if God was going to be born INTO this world, it would be in someplace GRAND, like a palace or mansion. But God chose to be born in a BARN.

We STILL use that expression to INSULT people: “Were you born in a BARN?”

Well, YES, JESUS WAS, and God PLANNED it that way. It SAYS something. God CHOSE for Jesus to be born in the WORST possible PLACE.

And look at the CIRCUMSTANCES of Jesus’ birth. His parents were young, and not even married yet. They’d been traveling for DAYS, and shortly AFTER Jesus’ birth, they fled to Egypt – they were basically on the RUN – REFUGEES. You would EXPECT that Christ would be born into a SECURE situation. But God chose to be born on the ROAD. God PLANNED it that way. It SAYS something. God CHOSE the WORST possible TIME.

WHY did God plan it this way? Because it says something about WHO GOD is. When difficult and painful things happen in our lives, God doesn’t just watch from a DISTANCE, and God doesn’t just OCCASIONALLY intervene from the OUTSIDE; God is WITH us. God WALKS with us THROUGH those hard times.

In Jesus’ birth, and in ALL that he became LATER, there’s THIS message: God comes to be WITH us. And to say “God is WITH us” is to say that “God is REALLY with us,” with us as we ARE. Not as we SHOULD be, or are TRYING to be, or have PROMISED to be, or WILL be SOMEDAY, but with us as we are NOW...TODAY...in THIS moment. God MEETS us in the WORST POSSIBLE moments, and MAKES them HOLY.

As presiding bishop Eaton says (in HER Christmas message this year), the birth of Jesus took place the WAY it did to SHOW us that “there is NO God-FORSAKEN PLACE, and we are NEVER ALONE — not in hospital rooms, or sheltering in place, or on Zoom calls.”

So, YES, EVEN NOW, in THIS time, even if a loved one is sick or dying or HAS died, even if we are separated from our loved ones, even if there's NO WORK, and no PRESENTS, and no FOOD. Even NOW, THIS is the when God SHOWS up. ESPECIALLY at a time like this. We are NEVER ALONE.

God came to live NEAR us, and WITH us, and IN us. God isn't in some strange and far-off place or time; God is RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW. We don't have to try to GET to God, God comes to US.

God loves us so MUCH, that He comes to US. God is WITH us.

God is HERE. God is WITH YOU, WHEREVER you may be right now. God is in the smiles of the children, and in the love of our families and friends. God is in the gifts we give and the people we help. God is in the stories we tell and the songs that we sing. God is ALWAYS WITH us, through all the joys AND through all the PAINS. God is WITH us!

As those kids said, Jesus, "thank you for coming. " "I love you, and you're the best baby I ever seen. There, I said it."

And you know, kids have a WAY of finding the REAL meaning of the story. They said, "The new baby is gonna CHANGE the WORLD."

Oh, may it be so, Lord. May it be so. Amen.