

Rev. Dr. Anne Epling

Faith Des Peres Presbyterian Church

December 24, 2013

Luke 2:1-20

## Christmas Eve

For those of you who have not been here for worship during Advent, I've been talking about how I have been determined this year to find balance during this crazy season we call Christmas. I have been determined to do what I can to make the holiday less stressful and exhausting and yet still enjoy the trappings it offers. I said over and over again that I wanted to enjoy the season, even some of the overly hyped commercialized parts of it, but I also wanted to find the *holy* in the *holiday*.

I had a few tricks up my sleeve to help me find balance. There are some traditions we do as a family that we decided to beg off of this year. We didn't get nearly all of our Christmas decorations out. And I decided early on that if everything on my to-do list didn't get done, that was OK with me. I learned years ago that, despite what I may think, the world doesn't come to a screeching halt if I don't get everything done.

But about mid-month, my little corner of the world started to unravel, little by little. I ran into car trouble-literally-which meant I had to deal with things like insurance adjustors and estimates for repair. My phone decided to stop working one day. Everyone loves ATT at the holidays! A gift I ordered got lost in the hinterlands of the USPS, which meant I had to do deal with the USPS-always a fun thing to do, especially on December 19! And we're in the midst of a kitchen remodel, which means we don't have a kitchen, and since last week was the week they sanded and stained our floors, we couldn't get to our basement, which just happens to be the place I stash all the unwrapped Christmas presents. "When are the presents going to go under the tree?" the kids wanted to know. "When I can get to the basement," I told them.

Feeling more than just a little frazzled and stressed, I found myself one morning at Walgreen's, doing exactly what I had vowed not to do, which was trying to find just one more present for one of the kids so everything would be *even*. As I stared at the cheap presents before me-"As seen on TV", "no assembly required", "don't forget the batteries!", I thought to myself: this is not what I wanted to do! This is not the Christmas I expected!

But as I sat down to prepare for tonight to find the holy in the holiday, I was reminded, once again, that despite the expectations I had set, and despite the expectations you may have set, we are here. And more importantly, God is here; which is the reason we are all here tonight. Despite the everyday life problems we have and the messes we find ourselves in, God is here. Joy to the world, we sing, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king! That, my friends, is the miracle of Christmas. That no matter what expectations we may have set, or what circumstances we may find ourselves in, God has come just like the angel said, for "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."

The miracle of Christmas is that God comes to us. We don't need to go searching for God like we go searching for the perfect Christmas gift, because God is here, God has come, God is with us.

And not only is God **with** us, God is with **us**. Ordinary people, like you and me. You see, God doesn't come only for the people who have their acts together, or who have checked off everything on their to-do lists and found the perfect Christmas presents and have them perfectly wrapped and under the tree weeks before Christmas. God comes for people like us, who may or may not have all of our presents wrapped yet, or who may still need to run by Walgreen's for one last thing. (You know who you are! Flick? Flick who?)

But I think we sometimes forget all of that in the midst of the hustle and bustle of the season. It's easy to get caught up in the idea that Christmas is supposed to be perfect, or as the song says, "The most wonderful time of year." This beautiful story we hear from Luke reminds us that God appears to less than perfect people in a less than perfect world. The shepherds who went to see what the fuss was all about? They were at the bottom of the social ladder and had less than stellar reputations. And Mary and Joseph? They were trying to make their way in the world, and were squeezed by rising taxes and family demands. Like the shepherds, they were badly in need of someone who would see them as precious in God's sight. And that someone is born right in the midst of their harried rush toward antiquity's equivalent of the April 15 tax-filing deadline.

Too often, I think, we look for God only in the beautiful moments. Or, we equate God with Santa Claus, and believe that God only comes for the good boys and girls. We think that if we are less than perfect, or less than holy, or have done something wrong, God won't come for us. But in this story we learn that God comes to us in the beautiful *and* not so beautiful moments of life, no matter who we are or what we have done.

The beauty of the God Luke proclaims is that the something Big we have been preparing for all month, has finally arrived in a very small package but with a love for **all** human kind that is greater than we can imagine. As the angel declared that night:

*Glory to God in the highest heaven,*

*And on earth peace among those whom he favors!"*

And who does God favor? You . . . and me . . . ordinary people gathered this night.

And so, as the angel said to Mary and Joseph, fear not. Do not be afraid. The Lord your God is with you.

Fear not; it's the most repeated phrase in the Bible, because it's the phrase we all need to hear. People facing a new job and a new adventure need to hear it. People facing surgery and critical illness need to hear it. Families, loved ones, and victims of disease, terrorist attacks, and military action need to hear it. The newly married and new parents need to hear. The newly unemployed and unattached need to hear it. We need to hear it. "Fear not, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for **all** the people."

At Christmas we're reminded of this very simple truth, that we have no reason to fear, for God has come to us.

Christmas encourages us to believe that no matter what happens, and no matter who we are, God has come. And not only has God come, but God has come for you.

A couple nights ago my youngest child, Charlotte, woke up crying around 2 am. Not a loud, wailing cry but a soft, muffled cry-the kind of cry that made me wonder if she'd fall back asleep without my needing

to go in to see what was the matter. But it went on, so I got up and found her sitting in her bed. She reached out her arms for me to pick her up, which I did, and I held her and told her it was OK. "Everything is going to be alright."

After a minute in her Mom's arms she said, "You can put me back into my bed." Which I did. I guess all she needed to know was that she wasn't alone and everything was OK. She didn't have anything to fear.

At Christmas, God comes to us and picks us up no matter who we are or what we have done and assures us that everything will be alright because God has come. The miracle of Christmas is that the God who set in the world in motion at the very beginning, is also the God who raised up a Savior for **us, who came to us, who lived among us, and who was born among us.**

This Christmas, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.