

Christmas Morning Sermon 2010
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Christmas is not
the most important day
in the Christian calendar,
that honor goes to Easter,
to the resurrection of our Lord.
But Christmas is certainly
the most beloved.
If Easter is the culmination
of the story of our life in Christ,
the fulfillment of God's plan.
Well, then Christmas
is the love story,
the courtship of God's people.

Because Christmas is when
God's love for us
became manifest in the
indwelling of God's son
in place and time.

There is so much
heart-wrenching love
in this story.
God has decided
to come among us,
to answer centuries
of groaning prayers
and faith-filled dreams
by being born into our lives
in the guise of an infant.

This was not unexpected.
Israel's prophets had been
promising that a child
would be born,
a messiah, a new king
who would bring joy and peace
and right the wrongs done to Israel
by many peoples
and in many ways.

But the child-king born
filled all these prophecies
in startling, topsy-turvy ways
that left those with eyes and ears
to see and hear gasping
at the audacious reversals
this messiah commanded.

The lost were to be searched for.
The poor were to be cared for.
The unclean were to be touched
and the ill healed.
Perhaps most importantly
the least and the last
were to be elevated to first.
And those who enjoyed
power and wealth in this world
were not guaranteed
anything in the next.

And this was never more apparent
than in the way this child
came into the world.
The child was born not to royalty
or to the high priests

but to an ordinary man and woman
in a very extraordinary way.

The woman was a virgin,
she gave birth far from home
in the city of Israel's greatest King.
The child himself
was descended from David –
but was born without fanfare
in the undercroft of an inn
where animals were kept
and hay was stacked
and feed troughs stood ready.

The child was announced
in advance to the parents
by angels carrying messages
of comfort and joy
declarations that the child
was a child of God,
born of the holy spirit,
sent to be a living word
of blessing to all people.

These same angels, perhaps,
or perhaps others
took the news of the actual birth
not to the travelers
sleeping and eating
in the rooms
above the inns' manager
where the infant slept.

Not to the good folk

of Bethlehem
or the others that had
journeyed there
to declare their existence
for the census.
Not to the temple priests, t
he elders or the leaders
of the people.

No, they took the news
to those living in the field,
caring for the woolly sheep
that followed them,
sleeping under the vast
sky of God,
forming a family of sorts
with the other shepherds
who lived and breathed
the life of sheep and goats,
herding and searching
and feeding and loving.

Perhaps they were
settling down to sleep
when they noticed the angels.
Perhaps they were sharing
a late meal,
gathered around a fire
or tending to small personal needs
like mending
or sorting their tools.

Perhaps they were making
a last check on the animals, s
haring stories of their families,

laughing at each other,
enjoying the camaraderie
of work.

Or possibly they were praying.
In an ordinary
and ritualistic moment
of prayer to God
perhaps the army of angels
burst into their midst
startling and frightening
the poor shepherds
who had hoped to
end their prayers quickly
and get to bed.

But who can sleep
after that kind of news?
Not only were they told
that God was blessing the world
with the birth of a king,
they were told
that this was to be
good news for all people,
not just the rich
or the wealthy
or the powerful.

The messiah was breaking
into the world with
the roar of a newborn
and the might of mewling lamb.
What a wonder,
what a reversal of expectation,
what a privilege to hear

this news in the company
of friends.

And so, they talk about this.
What can this mean,
what must we do?
We've been serenaded
by God's angels,
they must have thought,
we must sing this joy
to others.

Better yet, lets go
and sing this joy
to the very source!
Onward to Bethlehem then,
to see this newborn king!

And so they go
and they share the good news
with the child's parents
when they arrive
and they stare in wonder
at the swaddled baby
who is God's great love
for us enfleshed –
and they believe.

I envy the shepherds
that moment.
Ah, to have that moment
of knowing the messiah
was breath-takingly arrived
and to stare
for even a brief time,

into the newborn eyes
of God's love.

There is no suffering
in this messiah yet.
There is no persecution
for this son of man
and son of God.
Although it's coming.
No one is plotting his death,
although that will change
in a mere matter of days.

But for this
one moment,
the shepherds can simply
praise and worship,
love and adore,
follow and promise
and hope and dream
and commit themselves fully
to this magnificent infant
who will one day rule
not only their hearts
but the world.

That is what
we are invited to do
this Season.
This is our season of Joy!
This is our time
of merry making
when we commit ourselves
to God and his son,
joyously knowing

that everything about Jesus
is good news for us.

We need not sorrow or lament,
for this is not Lent.
We need not listen
to John the locust eating baptizer
on this day –
although he's coming still.

We need only ponder
in our hearts,
as Mary did,
the beauty of this night.
The love of God
that would come
to live among us.

The gift that we've been given
in the willingness
of God's own son
to leave the eternity
of the kingdom
to bring the certainty
of it
to us here on earth.

And so, sing out
your joy this day.
These hymns and carols
cry out our gladness
that Christ has come,
that Emmanuel is born,
that God is love
and God is with us

as good news
of love for everyone.

Keep watch for Christ's
birthing in your own world,
for the star to shine
in your heart,
for the trumpet
of the angels
to burst into your reality
singing the good news
that Christ at last has come. Amen.