

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called ‘Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’”

This is a very special time, for we are celebrating the birth of Jesus. Beyond doubt, Jesus of Nazareth was and is the most significant, most important person to ever walk this earth. In terms of the impact of a single life, no one ranks even remotely near him. We know this Jesus as the Son of God. But for all of this, the historical Jesus is and will forever be an enigma. We know very little beyond the body of Christian myth and legend, and the received stories are too weak to be bases for historical fact. We do not know for sure when and where he was born, although there is no reason to doubt the strong legend that he was born in Judea, most likely in Bethlehem, probably several years before what we now reckon as the beginning of the first century AD. As for the birth narratives that we have in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, there is simply no way to validate them as historical fact. But while there is much that we do not know about the historical Jesus, in spite of the Gospel witness, we do know that Jesus changed the world, and he still changes the lives of those with faith, and this is what really matters.

We are gathered here today, as a worshiping community, because of Jesus. We are gathered to honor him and celebrate the reality that in Jesus, God became one of us and one with us. For us, Jesus is God in human flesh, and the Christmas feast allows us to rejoice in God’s incarnation.

Now I’m telling you these things about Christmas for a reason. That reason is not to in any way denigrate the importance of Christmas, or to erode anyone’s faith. I’m telling you this in order for you to understand that the accounts that we have about our Lord’s birth, such as we have received them, are very human attempts to understand something that is beyond the grasp of history and something that is also beyond the grasp of human logic. With Christmas, we journey into the realm of faith, which is perfectly fine, because there is no way to approach God other than by faith. God by definition is mystery and the things of God are therefore mysterious. But in the mystery of God human trust and hope are born; trust that we are somehow linked to the mystery of the creating God, and hope that through that linkage, life has eternal meaning. Faith emerges from that trust and the rising hope of salvation, and faith finds definition in the on-going experience of God.

For the two thousand some odd years of Christian history, people have come to know God and experience God’s love through the man we call Jesus. In Jesus, we find the perfect revelation of God, to the point that we observe, in faith, that Jesus is the Son of the Living God, that he is, to use a theological construct, the Incarnate Word of God. He is the Word by which God created, when God said, “Let it be!” and it was. In faith, we believe that God became, in a mysterious way, human. By faith we believe that God lived among us as Jesus Christ.

By faith we believe that Jesus taught us how to walk in the way of God, so that we could be considered righteous by God. In faith, we believe that although we sometimes fail to walk a righteous walk and live a righteous life as God intends us to, God’s Incarnate Son died for us, because of our human failure, and in his death he took our sin upon himself, and offered himself as a sacrifice for that sin. Because of his sacrifice, in faith we are made righteous, not by our works, but by his love.

John's Gospel tells us that the Word of God became flesh and lived among us, and that in Jesus we behold God's glory. John's Gospel also tells us, that God sent his Jesus into this world because he loves us and that through Jesus we become children of God, members of the eternal family of God, called to live with him forever. Is it any wonder, then, that we want to celebrate the reality that in Jesus Christ God became man? So we gather, as a people redeemed, and celebrate in song and word the birth of the Messiah. We gather to commemorate this birth with the ancient rite of the Eucharist, through which he becomes present to us in his most holy Body and Blood. We gather to listen, once again, to Saint Luke's magnificent story of our Savior's birth, hearing the ancient legend of how Mary gave birth to her child, and laid him in an animal's stall, because there was no room for them in the inn. We imagine, in our minds, the shepherds, watching over their sheep and goat flocks, during the clear, cold night. We imagine the brilliant stars in God's Heaven. The theater of the mind takes us to that moment when to quote from St. Luke, "an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

"The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see--I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." The ancient story, the ancient legend still stirs us. God's grace still rides that wave of words we call the "Christmas Story," drawing us ever closer to the breast of God. That ancient story reaches out to embrace us with God's love, giving us God's peace and God's mercy, because Jesus Christ is born.
Amen.