

Sermon
Christmas Eve 2024

Merry Christmas to you all.

First, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that tomorrow is the First Day of Christmas, and the Twelve Days of Christmas run from then until January 5. You are all invited to join us on January 5 for our Twelfth Night Potluck and Gift Exchange/Thievery Party. And please, whatever you do, don't take your Christmas decorations down on Thursday, leave them up all twelve days. Thank you.

So again, Merry Christmas!

Tonight we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Tonight we sing with choirs of angels, of silent nights, and we join our voices with heaven and nature as all creation proclaims the miracle and mystery of God made man.

A theologian, whom I cannot now remember, once said that God's greatest miracle wasn't the Resurrection, it was the Incarnation. He might be right. It's easy for us to imagine the eternal, omnipotent God raising a dead man to life. It's easy for us to imagine that same God not only raising a dead man, but to do it in a manner that speaks to a completely new and changed life – not just resuscitation, but Resurrection. It's much harder, I think, for us to imagine the eternal, omnipotent God, creator of all that is, seen and unseen, relinquishing all that and submit to becoming a human being. And not a human being as a fully formed man, but a human being in the form of a helpless, vulnerable, and needy infant. And yet, God did just that.

We have gathered here to celebrate that miracle. Because not only is it amazing that the eternal, omnipotent God chose to take the form of a newly-born baby born in less-than-ideal circumstances, but we need to recognize that without the Incarnation there would be no Resurrection. Without Christmas, there is no Easter. Today we gather to celebrate the miracle of all miracles – God made man in the person of Jesus.

The Incarnation and Christmas celebration remind us of two things. The first is that God loves us. Tonight we are reminded that the eternal, omnipotent God

loved us enough to become human so we could have an example of what living in relationship with God truly looks like.

We no longer have to rely on our imagination or on someone's interpretation of Scripture to define this God/human relationship. Now, in the person of Jesus, we have a real life, flesh and blood example of what it means to live in unity with God.

Second, we are also reminded of the various responsibilities with which we are now given.

One responsibility is that of care. Mary and Joseph were given the responsibility of caring for the infant Jesus. It was their job to feed and clothe him. It was their job to shelter and protect him. It was their job to ensure he was educated. It was their job to ensure he had a good foundation from which to grow.

Likewise, we who are able have the responsibility to care for those in need. We need to help ensure people have access to food and clothing. We need to work to ensure people have access to shelter and healthcare. We need to ensure all people have access to a good education. It is our job, as Christians and as society in general, to ensure all people, but especially the vulnerable and those on the margins, have a good foundation from which to grow.

Another responsibility is that of proclamation. In the gospel story we heard the angels announce the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. After seeing the angels, the shepherds went to Bethlehem where they told Mary and Joseph what they themselves had been told. They then returned to their fields "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen." Luke doesn't say this, but the shepherds became the first evangelists telling people of the message they had received.

That responsibility of proclamation now falls to us. We now have a responsibility to tell people what we have heard and seen here tonight. Neither the miracle of Christ's birth nor how we are transformed in the presence of God through our participation and worship are events for which we can keep silent. It is not only our responsibility to hear the stories, it is also our responsibility to share these stories with others as the shepherds did.

Tonight we gather to celebrate the birth of Jesus. We gather to sing beloved hymns and to give thanks for God's selfless act of becoming human. But we are also

reminded that we are not passive observers to this event. We are key players in the story. Like Mary and Joseph cared for the infant Jesus, it is now our responsibility to care for the vulnerable among us. And like the shepherds who told people what they had heard and seen, it is also our responsibility to share our story of what we have heard and seen.

May these Twelve Days of Christmas fill you with peace, hope, joy, and love, such that you are compelled to follow the good example of Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds.

Merry Christmas.