



Thursday December 24, 2020
Luke 2:1-14 (Christmas Eve)

Pastor Tony Acompnado

I'm so excited because Christmas Eve is finally here! I love it because it's a time of great joy. In fact, it's my absolute favorite night of the year and I look forward to it all year long – almost from the moment it ends. And although we're not together in-person, I still get the sense that it's a special time for you as well. For so many of us it's quite possibly the first peaceful moment we will have had in the past several weeks, at least.

But now, hear the Angel proclaiming in the heavens:

“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. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:10-11)

Hear the angel choir singing praises:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, goodwill toward all people.” (Luke 2:14)

And just like that, our peaceful, quiet night has just been shattered by the most incredible proclamation of all time. Our lives and the lives of all people across every time and place will never again be the same. And we should be surprised by it. We should be astounded. We should be overwhelmed. Tonight, we celebrate the night of nights; the most wonderful night in all of history. *GOD . . .* God has come down from highest heaven and has taken on human form to be among us. God is no longer some distant, heavenly being who judges us from afar. Emmanuel. It's not a name – it's a proclamation. Emmanuel!! **GOD . . . IS . . . WITH . . . US!** God is with us – yesterday, today, and always!

What God set in motion on that first Christmas over 2,000 years ago can never be stopped. God set in motion the eternal salvation of all of creation, and it cannot be stopped by any power *in* creation – not even by an unwelcome virus or the unexpected pandemic that followed. *This* is the good news that I want you to hold in your hearts and take from here tonight. But I also want you to keep in mind that Christmas is just the beginning, because what began in a stable in Bethlehem, will only be fully accomplished on a hill outside of Jerusalem. So, keep that in your hearts as well, because even though we cannot fully comprehend it, the unexpected wonder of it all is that God has done everything out of love for us.

We should all be surprised how God shows up in the unexpected. Every single Christmas we should be just as surprised. But sadly, too often we're not. Even though we know the story. We know all about the census and the crowded town of Bethlehem and the stable and the shepherds and the angels. We should be surprised. This isn't how kings are supposed to come into the world. Kings are supposed to be born in palaces surrounded by adoring subjects. But the king of all creation comes into the world . . . surrounded by farm animals.

And this my dear brothers and sisters, is precisely the point. God has done what was least expected—that's what Christmas is all about. It's not about angels or the shepherds in the fields. Those images are simply the way that God gets our attention. It's about a baby in a manger. Christmas is about God pulling off the greatest surprise in all of history.

And God continues to come to us – in the kindness of a stranger or the encouragement of a teacher, in a phone call from a family member or a letter from a distant friend, through the care of a nurse or the compassion of a first responder – that's what Christmas is all about; it's about God coming to us in the most unexpected and surprising ways.



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And it's the unexpected wonder of it all that's just so amazing. It's the wonder of what happens in Bethlehem and it's the wonder of what happens in Jerusalem. It's the wonder of God coming to us – not us going to God, but God coming to us as a baby born in a stable and laid in a manger.

So many events have happened in our lives over the past year that have been unexpected to say the least, and yet through it all, Christmas reminds us that we must open our hearts, our minds, and our eyes to a guiding star that offers us hope and reassurance, wisdom and peace for our challenging and uncertain times. The birth of Jesus reminds us that we can celebrate this night – this Christmas, and every Christmas courageously and hopefully – because amidst all the grief and uncertainty, the mask wearing, physical distancing, loneliness, loss, struggling, pain, and death – God is with us. **Emmanuel – God is with us.** And my friends, there is certainly no better news than that. Thanks be to God. Merry Christmas!