



Sunday December 24, 2023
Luke 2:1-14 (Christmas Eve)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompanado

I can't even begin to tell you how excited I am that Christmas Eve is finally here! I absolutely love this night because it's filled with so much peace, joy, and celebration. In fact, it's my absolute favorite night of the year; one I look forward to all year long – almost from the moment it ends.

Tonight, we celebrate the night of all nights, the most wonderful night in all of history. God...The God of all creation has come down from heaven and taken on human form to be among *us*. Emmanuel. *God with us!*

And while God has always been and will always be with us – from wonderful moments like the birth of a new baby, finishing another semester of college, or starting a new job or relationship – to the difficult ones like struggling with your mental health, receiving a discouraging diagnosis, or losing a loved one. When I reflect on everything that's happening in our lives, our communities, and our world, I'd say this reminder is more important than ever.

But as much as I long to simply dwell in the peaceful glow of a tree lit sanctuary or reflect in the sentimental beauty of carols and candles or look ahead to the joy and laughter of spending time with family and friends – I need something more. And so on this most holy of nights I come. And this night *never disappoints*.

Because here in the midst of all the world's chaos, division, struggling, and sadness...and not so unlike the world on that *first* Christmas Eve – an angel sent by God proclaims:

“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.”

And then just like that, our quiet and peaceful night has been shattered by the most extraordinary announcement of all time. Our lives and the lives of people across every time and place will never be the same again.

Because this incredible announcement says it all. It declares the truth of Christmas. It's the only thing that needs to be said or really even can be said. And it's the only thing I wish to tell you tonight. Nothing more, nothing less. They are words of *“good news of great joy for all people.”*

Tonight, Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled. *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.”* Tonight, the angel Gabriel's words to Mary come alive. *“And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and*



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you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High...” Tonight, “*a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger*” is our sign that “*nothing will be impossible with God.*”

Every year, I come to this night wanting only one thing. I want to be reminded of the angel’s words. I want to be cradled in the truth of these words. I want to hold them in the manger of my heart. I want to be told that the story is true and that it can be trusted. I want to know the reality of this miraculous birth in my life and throughout our world.

And I have a feeling that’s what you want as well. In fact, I think that’s what we all want. We want to hear the angel’s words again for the very first time. And I think *that’s* why we’ve come here tonight.

I come here every year wanting to hear those words one more time and be reminded of their truth, because I’ve walked in darkness. Because I’ve known times when my life was covered by curtains of impossibility. Because I look at our world and ache to hear some good news of great joy – not just for myself, but for all people. And I’m guessing that you feel much the same way, because your life isn’t all that different from mine.

I have friends and loved ones who are walking in the darkness of cancer – waiting, wondering, weeping. I have lived in the dark land of grief and loss. The names and faces of family and friends run through my mind like tears down my face. The darkness of confusion, self-doubt, and not knowing have caused me to stumble and fall. Sometimes my words and actions, my choices and priorities, things I’ve done and left undone, have darkened my heart and mind, leaving me blind to new possibilities and held captive by impossibility.

Israel, Gaza, Russia, Ukraine, Charles University in Prague, the University of Nevada in Las Vegas, ignorance, hatred, violence, racism, and our broken political system, are just some of the patterns covering my curtains of impossibility. And I don’t know what to do about any of these.

I desperately want to hear good news of great joy for all people – for Jew and Palestinian, Muslim and Christian, liberal and conservative, gay and straight, citizen and immigrant, black, brown, and white – and I want to see that good news overcome our divisions.



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Believe me, I could go on and on, but I think you get the point. You know exactly what I'm talking about because these aren't only my stories. All you have to do is change a few names and details and they're your stories too. They're the stories of all of us.

Every one of us has experienced some form of darkness. Every one of us has stood before a curtain of impossibility. Every one of us has longed to be told good news of great joy. And for some of us this wasn't just sometime in the past year, but it describes what's going on in our life in *this very* moment.

That's why I came here tonight – because I want to be reminded that this story is real and true. And that's why I think you've come here too – because we all want the same thing. We come because the manger of Jesus never disappoints.

Every year I leave this night having seen the “*child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger*” and once again, as if for the first time, I know with absolute certainty that this story is true. And I always leave here knowing the reality of its truth for my life. And tonight, you and I will leave here knowing that...

In our darkness and despair the manger shines with the Light of the World;
In our confusion and self-doubt the manger holds the Wonderful Counselor;
In our weakness and impossibility the manger cradles the Mighty God;
In our chaos and conflict the manger holds the Prince of Peace;
In our guilt and regret the manger is filled with the Merciful One;
In our fear and despair the manger is filled with the Good Shepherd;
In our hunger and poverty the manger holds the Bread of Life;
In our thirst and desire the manger holds the Cup of Salvation; and
In our humanity the manger cradles the very presence of God.

Somehow that little manger in Bethlehem holds all of it – you and I – every aspect of our lives, and all of creation is cradled in him. Tonight, the Savior of the world is born and by his birth we are restored.



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I can't tell you *how* this happens because I don't know. I only know that it *does* happen. Year after year, it happens. Because I've experienced it in my own life, and I've seen it happen in the lives of others. What I can tell you is, "*To you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*" And *this*, my dear friends is good news of great joy for all people.

So much has happened in our lives over the past year and yet through it all, Christmas reminds us to keep our hearts, minds, and eyes open to a guiding star that offers us comfort, hope, joy, and peace for all the moments of this life.

The birth of Jesus reminds us that we are invited to celebrate *this night – this Christmas, and every Christmas* with hope and joy – because in the midst of all the grief and uncertainty, loneliness, loss, struggling, pain, and death – God is with us. Emmanuel – God with us. And there is certainly no better news than this.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!