

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 2:1-14

"God Knew What the World Needed"

In the time of Noah, over 4,000 years ago – the world was in love with sin, except for one family. God knew what the world needed – and so the great flood covered the earth and everyone died, with the exception of Noah and his family. In the time of Abraham, about 3,900 years ago – sin was running rampant – with many people doing terrible things to one another – and their lives were mostly about sinning. God knew what the world needed – and so He rained fire and brimstone on the two of worst offending cities – Sodom and Gomorrah, until they were no more. And then, well over 2,000 years ago – the world had fallen in love with physical and earthly desires – and with lies instead of the truth. God knew what the world needed, but it wasn't trees all lit up or all that comes with that. He knew that they world needed a rescuer. Someone to get the world back on track, and to save the world from all that it had done and to get them to change their ways. God knew that the only one who could possibly do that was Himself – in the person of His Son. And so He sent His Son, Yeshua, or Jesus to be born in a stable. He was humbled as a child who needed to rely on His mother and earthly father to provide and care for His needs – until He was grown.

The saying that Jesus is the 'reason for the season' is true, but we must not lose track of the reason that HE came in the first place. For that fact we are truly grateful.

During this Christmas celebration tonight- let us give thanks for Him, for one another, and for those who know Him. Let us pray for those that do not know Him yet – that Jesus would reveal Himself to them and that they would truly celebrate the birth of our rescuer – our Savior, Jesus, this Christmas.

In the message that the angels delivered to the shepherds the night of Jesus' birth, we first learn what Christmas is all about - God had sent His Son to earth – to become human. This was not man's idea; it was God's idea! Christmas was not man's initiative; it was God's initiative. Christmas came about - all because of God. Tonight, let's try to celebrate the reasons why God did what He did at Christmas.

I think we all can agree that because there was no room at the inn in Bethlehem, that Joseph and Mary's only option was to find shelter in a stable. Having visited the Holy Land twice, once in 1999 and the second time in 2014, you come to realize that this stable was not a wooden shelter, but instead a cave where the animals had shelter, especially those who were about to or had given birth. When Jesus was born, for His safety He was placed in a manger. Many, including myself, have preached about a manger being a feeding trough. How many of us have seen a Christmas card or photo of what was believed to be the kind of manger Jesus was laid in? Did you know that in ancient Israel, mangers were made of stone, and they were not all that comfortable, but they were very protective.

Feast of the Nativity – Christmas Eve, December 24, 2021, Year C

You have heard me say that Bethlehem was actually Bet Lechem – which meant ‘House of Bread.’ It was where young David, the shepherd, who became king lived. Bethlehem is only about 5 miles south of Jerusalem, near a hill known for raising the sacrificial lambs for the Temple – and when these lambs were born, they would be wrapped in cloth and put in such a stone manger. Not all of the lambs would be put there, just the ones they thought were without blemish - and suitable for the blood sacrifices that took place twice a day. Sacrifices to cover sin. These were the lambs that Bethlehem was famous for. The priests wanted to keep the lambs without bumps and bruises. So they'd wrap them up tightly. They'd swaddle them, wrapping them in special cloths, like precious and terribly fragile bottles of wine. And they'd lay them in a manger.

The word "manger" is only mentioned in one account of Jesus' birth, in the Gospel of Luke chapter 2 that we read tonight. And it makes sense. There's really only a small group of people who would understand it's significance, and they are the very ones who hear the words: *"You will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger."* (Luke 2:12) They are the shepherds, the shepherds of the sacrificial flock. They knew what the cloths and the manger meant. The angel said, *"This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."* (Luke 2:12) To the shepherds it was. It wouldn't have been a sign to many people, but to them – it was a most important and staggering sign.

The long-expected King, the long-propheesied Messiah, wasn't headed to a palace. No, this King was going to be different. This was a sign that said that He was going to be sacrificed. They knew where the Messiah was born, but they also knew where He was headed. I want you to think of the first verse of the beautiful Christmas Hymn, “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing” which by the way is Hymn 87 in our Red Hymnal. The first verse is this: *“Hark the Herald Angels sing, Glory to the newborn King. Peace on earth and mercy mild God and sinners, reconciled. Joyful, all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies, with angelic host proclaim Christ is born in Bethlehem! Hark the Herald Angels sing, Glory to the newborn King.”*

This Christmas, as you will head home after church, please remember Who the reason for season is, and what the reason for His coming is. God knew what the world needed, it needed a rescuer, a Savior, and so He sent His Son, to do the things that we cannot do.

John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus’ identity for the whole world to hear and remember – one that the shepherds in Bethlehem knew very clearly. *“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!”* (John 1:29) and we proclaim, *“Glory to the newborn King!”*