

Christmas Eve – December 24, 2015, Year C

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

***“Christmas – God’s Prophecy Fulfilled”***

It is such a beautiful, balmy night – it might have been something like this in Bethlehem. I must say that Gray (McKinnon – organ) and Bill (McIntosh – trumpet) playing tonight touches hearts – and it is absolutely beautiful. The Prelude of “Carol of the Bells” and the striking of eleven bells to begin the service was beautiful. The choir sounds marvelous as well.

The words of tonight’s Gospel say *“But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”* (Luke 2:10-11) Before the foundation of the world was laid, God planned that His Son would be the sacrifice to pay for the sins of all people. The world needed a Savior – and God’s only Son – Jesus - is that Savior! In the 3rd chapter of Genesis, and all the way throughout the Old Testament - prophecy after prophecy proclaimed that the Messiah would come, He would be born and live among us as the Lamb of God that takes away our sins. Before the world could have Easter Sunday – there had to be Christmas – the birth of God’s Messiah – the Christ, Jesus.

Mary and Joseph were chosen by God - Mary, to be the mother of God’s Son, and Joseph to be the one commissioned to take care of them both – as Jesus’ adopted father. I don’t know about you, but I cannot wait to meet him – what a guy he must have been, to take this on, so that Jesus could grow and be the Man that would go to the cross for us. In the film from a few years ago “The Nativity Story” they show an example of the cultural pressures of first century Israel, especially as rumor and gossip began to flow through the streets of Nazareth because Mary was expecting a child even before she and Joseph were married. The evil King Herod enforced Caesar Augustus’s decree that every family must return to their home town for the census. So even though the baby is due at any time, Mary and Joseph had to make the journey all the way to Bethlehem from Nazareth. You need to know where these two places are located: Nazareth is in the north, in the Galilee region, and Bethlehem is south in Judea and that trip is about 80 miles long. They had to walk – with only the aid of one donkey. They made that journey with no comfortable accommodations, no clean sheets to sleep between, no TV sets to entertain them, not even an iPhone! How did they do it? Slowly they traveled, sleeping out underneath the stars, and remember that once they arrived in Bethlehem there is the complication of finding lodging.

In the film, Bethlehem is depicted as small stone buildings, even some caves. As Mary’s time to give birth approached Joseph banged on door after door. Because of the tenacity of Joseph, and perhaps the compassion of the person who owned the stable, they were offered to stay in a place where animals feed, and they found shelter for the night. There must have been quite a commotion in that small little town of Bethlehem.

On the night Jesus was born, it was a private celebration at first with just Mary and Joseph, and the animals. They knew something that no one else knew. They knew that this baby was God’s own Son, and that His birth was a miracle. Soon the celebration got larger; angels spoke

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to shepherds and announced that a Savior had been born, who is Christ the Lord. The shepherds came rushing to see this new baby. It is quite possible that even some people from the little town of Bethlehem came out and peeked through cracks in the wall to see what was going on, and then they may have joined in the celebration. But, they're not mentioned in Gospel account.

When Micah, the Old Testament prophet, foretold the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, he emphasized its simplicity and lack of significance to the world. *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."* (Micah 5:2)

Bethlehem – *Beit Lechem* - "*The House of Bread.*" Bread is one of life's most common and needed things. God wanted His Son to be available to not just one town, but to the entire world. His birth was announced to shepherds, the common man, but not to King Herod. His cradle was a manger, an animal's feeding trough in a lowly stable. Imagine – God's only Son, born among animals, humbling Himself in such a way. I think God was telling us that there is no human, no matter how low, that he or she is outside the reach of the love of God!

Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, "the house of bread", to satisfy the spiritual hunger of all people. Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me will not hunger, and whoever believes in Me will never thirst."* (John 6:35) I think that bread is a good comparison to Jesus because He satisfies, gratifies, and strengthens us spiritually just as bread does for us physically.

Unfortunately there are some who are not hungry for this bread, and you might even say they are eating at the wrong table. God said through the Prophet Isaiah *"Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare."* (Isaiah 55:2) There are a lot of things that bring us temporary happiness and temporary fulfillment, but believe me - only Jesus Christ satisfies the eternal element of the human spirit – the inner being, the soul.

There's a story in the Bible about a man who had a lot of things going for him, but he wasn't living up to his potential. That man's name was Saul and he lacked self-confidence. He didn't understand that God had a plan for his life. When the prophet Samuel told Saul that he was God's choice to be the first king of Israel, he foretold several things that Saul would see in the near future so that Saul would be certain that the message truly came from God. One of them was of a man carrying three loaves of bread. (1 Samuel 10:3) Three loaves were way more than Samuel could eat in a meal. He would have enough left over for future meals. It is a beautiful image of the abundance of the work of Almighty God in the life of His servants and it is the image of the abundance of God's spiritual provision for His people.

I want to suggest to you, tonight, that Jesus Christ is all that a person needs for spiritual satisfaction – for spiritual completeness. The fact that Jesus was born in "The House of Bread"

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should give us confidence in the fact that God has chosen US to be His children, no matter how insignificant we may seem to ourselves or to the world around us. Believe me, this is huge! God loves us enough to walk in our shoes – as a human being – and to draw us to Himself – in spite of all of our inadequacies.

Here's a question for you: what books of the Bible are about Jesus? The answer is simple – ALL OF THEM! In the Old Testament - from Genesis to Malachi – God points to people's need for a Savior – and He leaves us “bread crumbs” along the way – to alert all people how to recognize Him when He comes. A perfect example of this is in Genesis 22 when Isaac is taken up to a mountain in the Moriah Region on a mission that he does not know what is happening. He asks his father Abraham – we have the wood for the sacrifice and we have the knife, but “*where is the lamb for the sacrifice?*” Abraham's answer points right to Jesus – when he says “*God Himself will provide the lamb.*” God Himself is the Lamb!

Every year the people of Israel – the Jewish people, celebrate the time when they were saved by the “blood of the lamb” on the very first Passover – which is God's telling His people that they will one day be saved by the Blood of His own Lamb – Jesus Christ. In Exodus 16, the Israelites – who were saved from bondage in Egypt, were given bread from heaven, new each morning in the form of manna – and one day they would receive true bread from heaven in Jesus – the bread of life.

Believe me I could go on and on – but this is Christmas Eve – and we all have much to do – so let me get right to the point: There are over 400 Old Testament prophecies that have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God laid out the information pointing to the truth that we celebrate tonight as declared in John 1:1-3, 14 “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” God Himself took on flesh to save humanity from itself! Jesus Christ is the promise of God fulfilled – fulfilled by God Himself.

Jesus the Christ was born in Bethlehem to teach us that every one of us must choose Him as Savior for ourselves as Savior. It has to be your own personal choice – no one can make it for you. God will never force Himself upon you! If one person eats a meal, it doesn't satisfy the person next to them. They may watch them eat – but they will not get full. The Apostle Paul reminds us “*Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.*” (1 Corinthians 10:17) That “*one loaf of bread*” is Jesus Christ. He is the only bread that offers life and the decision to receive Him is an individual one, a personal one. “*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*” (Luke 2:11)

Tonight, we celebrate the birth of the baby, Jesus Christ, into the world, who is the promise of Almighty God – but we also celebrate and give thanks for the grown up Jesus, who willingly went to the cross – so that His sacrifice would complete God's promise of our own salvation –

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and that His body and blood would be shed, in our place – so that we might live. Jesus Christ is indeed the “Bread of Life” because of what He has done for each one of us. Baptized believers of Jesus will come forward in just a few moments to receive the consecrated bread and wine – as the real presence of Jesus Christ – in Holy Communion; a most precious gift that He has given to us.

Let me in closing, share with you one of the most precious Bible verses, from Revelation. Jesus Himself said, *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."* (Revelation 3:20) Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, so that He could come into our hearts and into our lives - if we let Him. He wants to feed us for all eternity – but we need to give Him permission. Have you ever seen the picture of Jesus standing in a garden, and there is a door; there is no handle or knob on the door? Because Jesus Christ is a gentleman He will not force the door open, He of course could walk right on through. He is waiting for you to respond. We need to let Him into our lives. If you have never opened the door of your heart to Jesus Christ – what better time than to start tonight – when we remember His simple birth in a manger.

Jesus Christ is standing at the door and knocking. Will you open that door to Him tonight?