

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

“A Personal Savior”

One night a man decided to show his wife how much he loved her. After dinner he began to recite romantic poetry, telling her he would climb high mountains to be near her, swim wide oceans, cross deserts in the burning heat of day, and even sit at her window and sing love songs to her in the moonlight. She listened to him go on for some time about this immense love he had – and she ended the conversation with just one question: “But will you wash the dishes for me?”

Just how much will one person do for another? That is a very telling question! It probably depends on who that person is doing it for, and then again there is the very important WHY. Many times what we do for another is conditional – there are terms and quite often a repayment of the favor. I think that is why so many people have a difficult time believing that God would actually send His Son to become a human being. I mean, think about it – why would God lower Himself to hurt, be hungry and all that goes with being a human – and not want something in return? Well, that’s wrong thinking, totally wrong. God does want something in return, for us to love Him – and turn our lives toward Him as Lord.

Two brothers – Kevin and Ryan - ages five and three, were waiting for breakfast one Saturday morning. Their mother was preparing pancakes – and they began to argue pretty loudly over who would get the first one “hot” off the griddle. Well, Mom was not one to pass up an opportunity to teach them a moral lesson – so she told them that if Jesus were sitting here – He would say: “Let my brother have the first pancake – I can wait!” Kevin immediately turned to his younger brother and said “OK Ryan, you be Jesus!”

There is only one Jesus, and no one could ever take His place – but instead, remarkably, He took ours! In an Old Testament lesson from the Prophet Isaiah – he boldly foretells of the special birth that would take place when Jesus became human – in that Little Town of Bethlehem, and the result of that special sacrifice. *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.”* (Isaiah 9:6-7) You have got to agree with me, this was not going to be a normal child – but a king -the King of Kings!

Sadly enough in today’s day and age, there are some in the Christian Community, who question the validity of these claims – or even the truth of His birth – or the fact that He was born of a virgin - as we heard about in today’s Gospel of Luke. Let me share with you some insight into God’s plan. Many years before Jesus was born – God chose a city – the City of David – as prophesied by Isaiah as the birthplace of His Son. The city called Bet Lechem – or as we know it Bethlehem. Bet means “House of” in Hebrew and Lechem means “bread.” The One who would call Himself the “Bread of Life” would be born in a city called “The House of Bread” –

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Bethlehem. God knows what He is talking about and He prepared long before the birth of Christ. Let me share with you something else: in today's Holy Gospel – who were the first people that the birth of Our Lord was announced to? Shepherds! So here we have shepherds hearing the proclamation that the King, the Messiah has been born; and who would Jesus be later on? The Good Shepherd! God has a plan, my friends.

The Apostle Peter confirms the truth about Jesus and His divinity – when he wrote these powerful words taken from 2 Peter 1:16-18. *“For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”-- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.”* Eyewitnesses affirm the truth that **Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God**, and that He was born from the Virgin Mary. The Apostle John begins his epistle with these words – as an eyewitness to the events of the life of Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:1-3 says *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”* When Jesus proclaimed, on the night before He died, to His disciples (in John 14:6) He said that *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me”* He was confirming all of the prophecies and the fact that mankind's need for a savior was fulfilled right before their very eyes in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. This is no myth or urban legend – no, my friends **this is truth – and on that you can be certain!**

That special night in Bethlehem, the angel of the Lord appeared and proclaimed to the shepherds: *“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) The word Savior means to rescue you from harm or danger and most dictionaries even on the web point to Jesus Christ. Today, tonight and tomorrow we celebrate His birth – an awesome miracle in itself! What a blessing it will be that sometime right after midnight we will be receiving Holy Communion – the Precious Body and Blood of Jesus – on the day we celebrate His Birth.

In one of the earlier editions of (you might remember) “America's Funniest Home Videos” there was a clip from a Japanese version of the show. The clip showed a brother and a sister coming to a break in the sidewalk. There was a long step across – and the gap was about two feet. The boy made it across quite easily – with a huge leap, but his sister was terrified and she refused to even try it. The boy gave it his all trying to convince her to give it a try – but her answer was still an intense NO! So what did the boy do? He stretched out across the gap, forming a human bridge with his body. His sister safely crawled across the span – secured by

her brother's sacrifice. So let me ask you: How far would any of us go for a sister or brother in need?

Two thousand years ago – God stepped into history – by taking on human flesh, in the form of His Son – Jesus Christ. My friends – what God did in Bethlehem was personal; for each and every one of us. There is no doubt about it, that at this time of year, everyone loves the baby in the manger, 'He's so cute' and everybody comes to visit; but what they don't like is the 33 year old Man who goes to the cross. When you start to talk about the cross, they suddenly take a turn. I believe you cannot look at the baby in the manger without looking forward to the immense sacrifice that Jesus made – giving of Himself – to pay the price for us – in our place. I don't know if you understand this or not - but that is personal; absolutely personal!

I was driving along and listening to the Sirius XM Christian station and I heard a Christmas song by a group named "Downhere" – and the song is called "How Many Kings." What struck me about it was that there was a series of questions that would be right for this sermon – and so I borrowed them:

*'Cause how many kings, stepped down from their thrones?
How many lords have abandoned their homes?
How many greats have become the least for me?
How many Gods have poured out their hearts;
To romance a world that has torn all apart?
How many fathers gave up their sons for me?
Only one did that for me!*

We are all familiar with the words spoken by Jesus, recorded in John 3:16. I want to leave you with a special, personal Christmas gift; to see this Scripture as a personal gift from God to you. Repeat after me: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*" I do believe that you cannot read verse 16 without verse 17: "*For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*" Now, here is the gift – take John 3:16 and remove the generic words – so that it says "*For God so loved **me** that He gave His only begotten Son, that if **I believe in Him I shall not perish, but I will have eternal life.***" What a precious, personal gift from a precious, personal savior!