

Feast of the Nativity, December 24, 2022, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 2:1-14

"Let Him In"

To you and your loved ones, I want to wish you a very joyful, blessed and Merry Christmas! It is really a time for celebration. You may have noticed that we lined the walk up to the church with our luminaries – and it is the 8th Christmas that we have done this, since 2014. You see those lights outside our door tonight, and hopefully they brought you home to a church that loves you, a Savior who loves you, giving Himself for you. A joyful celebration is in here. Merry Christmas to all!

We celebrate what the Angel said: *"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."* (Luke 2:10-11) Before time even began, God planned that His Son would be the special sacrifice to pay the price for the sins of every person. The world needed a rescuer - a Savior – and God's only Son, Jesus of Nazareth is that Savior! Looking all the way back from Genesis chapter 3, when Eve and Adam sinned by disobeying God, and all throughout the Old Testament - prophecy after prophecy proclaimed that God's Anointed One, His Messiah would come. He would be born and would live among all His people as *"the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world."* (John 1:29) Before the world could have the freedom of Easter Sunday, there had to be Christmas, with the birth of God's Messiah – the Christ. The world absolutely loves the baby in the manger, with signs up, and Christmas cards, you even go on Facebook and people are putting on images of the Baby in the manger, but the world has a really hard time accepting the man that the baby grew up to be and what He did for the world. You see, I guess that is not politically correct. Oh how Humbly He came.

Mary and Joseph were pretty ordinary people, but they were especially chosen by God, with Mary, to be the mother of God's Son. I would like you to think about this: for nine months she carried God in her womb. Joseph was a carpenter, and he was chosen to be charged with taking care of both Mary and Jesus. It was because of the census, they had to travel about 80 miles from their home in Nazareth, in the northwestern part of Israel, south to Bethlehem. They had to walk, and we presume they only had the assistance of a donkey. The whole trip would have taken about 4 or 5 days. Could you imagine walking 4 or 5 days, not on a chilly night like tonight, to be sure, but they made that journey with no comfortable accommodations, and they had to travel slowly, because Mary was in her ninth month. They were probably sleeping out underneath the stars, and once they arrived in Bethlehem there was the complication of finding a place to stay.

On the night Jesus was born, it was a private celebration at first - just Mary and Joseph, and we believe the animals were there too. The shepherds knew from the messages from the angel, that this baby was God's own Son, and that His birth was truly a miracle. Soon the angels spoke to shepherds and announced that a Savior had been born, who is *"Christ the Lord."* The word "Christ" is a Greek word – 'Christos' which means 'anointed one or Messiah.' The shepherds came rushing to see this new baby.

When Micah, the Old Testament prophet, foretold the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, he stressed that “little town’s” simplicity and lack of significance to the world. He said, *"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)

I have reminded you many times through our years together that Bethlehem – *Bet Lechem* – is *"The House of Bread."* Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, "the house of bread," to satisfy the spiritual hunger of mankind. Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."* (John 6:35) Bread is a good comparison to our Lord because He satisfies, gratifies, and strengthens us spiritually just as bread does for us physically. The “Bread of Life” was born in “the house of bread.”

Regrettably, there are some people who are not hungry for this bread, and they really might even be described as “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 your soul. Jesus of Nazareth, who was born in Bethlehem, is all that a person needs for spiritual satisfaction, and for spiritual completeness. God loves each one of us enough to walk in our shoes, as a human being, and to draw us to Himself – in spite of all of our faults and shortcomings.

Throughout all of the Bible, God has spoken through His prophets, and through situations that took place – to alert the world how to recognize the Messiah when He comes. A perfect example of this is in Genesis chapter 22 when young Isaac was on the way up Mount Moriah and asks his father, Abraham *"where is the lamb for the sacrifice?"* Abraham’s answer points right to Jesus when he says, *"God himself will provide the lamb."* My friends, the truth is that God Himself is the Lamb!

Each year the people of Israel, the Jewish people, celebrate being saved by the “blood of the lamb” on that very first Passover, when they had taken the blood of a perfect lamb and put it on the outside of the doorposts of their house, so that the angel of death would pass them by. That very first Passover, God was alerting His people that they will be saved one day by the Blood of His very own Lamb, His Son, 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. They would collect it so that they would be able to eat, and one day they would receive true bread from heaven in the person of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

God laid out the information pointing to the very truth that we celebrate tonight, that He 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*

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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, to save all of us, from ourselves. Jesus Christ is the promise of God fulfilled – fulfilled by God Himself. Oh, how humbly He came!

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, to teach us that each one of us must choose Him as Savior for ourselves. It has to be our own personal choice – no one can make it for us. If one person eats, it doesn't satisfy another person's hunger. If someone has two glasses of wassail (at 10:00 tonight) – one of those glasses just doesn't deliver itself over to me who didn't have any. It doesn't work that way. 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”* is Jesus Christ. He is the only bread that offers life and the decision to receive Him is an individual one, a personal one. Remember the words - *“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”*

This evening, we celebrate the birth of the baby, Jesus, into the world, as the promise of God – but we also celebrate and give thanks for the grownup Jesus, who went to the cross so that His sacrifice would complete God's promise of salvation, for each one of us, so that we might live, and that His body and blood would be shed, in our place, so that we might live. Jesus Christ is the *“Bread of Life”* because of what He has done for 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 the Holy Communion; a most precious gift that He Himself has given to us.

In closing, I want to share with you tonight, one of my very favorite verses of the Bible, from the Book of Revelation and it gives us an amazing image of Jesus, our Savior, reaching out to each one of us who seeks a personal relationship with Him. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus Himself said this, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”* 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 open the door of our hearts, inviting Him into our lives. And so my dear friends, let this Christmas be the day that you finally and fully welcome the King into your heart. He is standing at the door and knocking. Let Him In! Merry Christmas!