

“It’s All About Jesus”

Liturgical Date: Christmas Eve

Primary Text: St. Matthew 1:18-25 and St. John 1:1-14

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The primary texts for this evening, Christmas Eve, are from the first chapters of the Gospels of Sts. Matthew and John. The title of the sermon is “It’s All About Jesus.”

I think we all can agree that there is a lot going on this time of year. The build-up in Advent and the now arriving official beginning of Christmas is a special time. There is so much joy and so many fun things to do. You really couldn’t escape Christmas, even if you wanted to. It is everywhere. On TV, radio, stores, social media, and in people’s conversation. But the sheer volume of it can become overwhelming and a little bit tiring, can’t it? It’s kind of like the volume knob being turned all the way to the right (or up to “11”) for weeks on end.

Now anyone that knows me knows that I love this time of the year. When I think about Christmas that song, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year” plays in my mind. But I do have to make a confession. Even for a lover of all things Christmas like myself, it can be a little tiring. Some of you, I am sure, can relate. I consider myself pretty knowledgeable about Christmas music, but recently I heard a Christmas song on the radio that I did not know. I researched it and it has actually been around since 1986. A DJ at a Boston rock station put it together, Bob Rivers. He has actually produced several successful parody songs and this one was a parody of the classic “12 Days of Christmas”.

This song I recently heard is called the “Twelve Pains of Christmas.” You all know the original, as it adds a Christmas gift for each stanza and then counts down back to the beginning as each thing is added, of course beginning and ending with “A partridge in a pear tree.” While this one goes through things that many can find annoying at Christmas time and begins and ends with “finding a Christmas tree”. You won’t get the full effect

with me just listing them here, but here they are counting down: singing Christmas carols, stale TV specials, batteries not included, finding parking spaces, whining children, charities, facing the in-laws, five months of bills, sending Christmas cards, hangovers, rigging up the lights, and finding a Christmas tree. I heard this while out doing some Christmas shopping and could relate to several of these at that moment and chuckled. Maybe you would too!

Now of course this song is meant to be cynical in a funny way. Some of these activities we might actually enjoy, but when combined with everything else they can seem like “just another thing I have to get done by Christmas.” During this season you can really stretch yourself too thin and not enjoy it as much as you could. Too much of a good thing, perhaps. And why would this happen? As Christians we can probably answer that fairly easily. Because the focus has been taken off of Jesus. Like that exasperated Charlie Brown, we may feel like yelling out amidst all of the “holiday hoopla”, “*Does anyone know what Christmas is really all about?!*” Many of the traditions that even not-so-religious folks celebrate around this time of year such as gift giving, Christmas Trees, and carols have Christian roots and symbolism-but that is often lost in the shuffle.

The Christmas account from St. Luke Chapter 2 (which we will hear tomorrow) is more well known than the one that we heard from St. Matthew Chapter 1 this evening. But the Evangelist St. Matthew tells us what we need to know in those 9 brief verses. I love how he begins it as there is no doubt about what we are going to hear, “*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.*” We are introduced to Mary and Joseph and told that this birth was a miracle, as Mary was a virgin. The Lord speaks to Joseph through an angel in dream. This soon to be born son was to be named Jesus, for he would save his people from their sins. This would not just be a human baby, but a divine one: Emmanuel, God with us. So much there, in an economy of words.

Amongst the Christmas craziness and the world’s attempts to downplay the “Christ” part of Christmas, the Word is there. If we allow ourselves to become so overwhelmed

with all of the stuff, like in song, Christmas can become a pain. If our celebrations and traditions don't point us to Jesus, we miss the point. Christmas is all about Jesus.

It is not surprising that a secular and pluralistic world would miss the point of Christmas and significance of Jesus' birth. We really shouldn't expect anything different. But I have also found that even many Christians don't quite grasp the magnitude of what Christmas really means. This is because many drive two big of a wedge between the Old Testament and the New. Yes, the Second Person of the Trinity takes on human flesh at the incarnation nine months before His birth in Bethlehem. However, we must never forget that pre-incarnate Christ always existed, just like the Father and the Holy Ghost. Remember the first verse of John's Gospel, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" The text goes on to tell us of the Word (the pre-incarnate Christ's) role in creation, life, and light. Christmas is a huge part of the story of God redeeming man as the God man literally emerges from Mary's womb. But to fully appreciate this we look to the pages of the Scripture much earlier than the Gospels.

This is what we have been hearing about in our series this Advent Season, "Symbols of Salvation." This is what we have been studying on Wednesday evenings since August and will continue to study in the new year. The pre-incarnate Christ appeared to Moses from the burning bush. And figures of the Old Testament, like Moses, Gideon and David, are what are called "types" of Christ. Events like the ark and the flood, the deliverance from slavery in Egypt and passing through the Red Sea, the bronze serpent on the pole, the manna, the promise to Abraham and the sparing of Isaac, and we could go on-all are "shadows" that preview and point to what Jesus would do. And of course, the tabernacle and later the temple along with its sacrificial system and even all the furnishings of it are fulfilled in the greatest sacrifice and high priest, Jesus. And so much more. The very promises made right after the fall into sin and to Abraham, the prophecies revealed through Isaiah: they will all be fulfilled. (This is why I love the Lessons and Carols Service!)

If you regularly hear the sermons that I preach and especially the Bible classes that I teach you won't go too long without hearing me say this: If someone asks you what the Bible is about and you can only use one word, the best answer is "Jesus" (give the congregation time to "fill in" this blank). It is not only the Gospels that speak about Jesus. And not even the adding in the Epistles and Revelation goes far enough. Jesus is in the Old Testament too. Remember what Jesus did with the two disciples on the Emmaus Road? Luke 24:27, "*And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*" It's all about Jesus. It really is.

If you take Jesus Christ away from the Scripture, you have just ripped the heart of the living Word of God. If you dismiss the miracles and fulfilled prophecies you have gutted the Bible. Actually, you haven't-you would have tried, but no one-not even the devil Himself can overcome the Word. It will stand forever. Jesus is victorious forever. As our reading from John 1 made clear, Jesus is the light come into the world. And darkness cannot overcome this light, because it is the light of God. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, and these words from Isaiah will come to pass. A Savior from sin, as St. Matthew proclaimed. And then John 1:12, "*But even as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*" This the will of God.

Verse 14, "*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*" And dwell among us He did. And keep the law perfectly among us, He did. And suffer among us, He did. And die among us, He did. And then rise from the dead in victory over death, sin, hell, and the devil, He did. Thanks be to God! It is all about Jesus.

Even this very night perhaps you have been running through that mental checklist in your head. Things you still need to do, places you will need to be. Don't let all of those things that are supposed to be enjoyable, but can become stressful, distract you from the real meaning of Christmas. If this happens, take a few moments and re-read Matthew 1:18-

25 to re-focus. It is all about Jesus. And even beyond Christmas, when you are reading your Bible always keep this in view: It is all about Jesus. “*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given*” (Isaiah 9:6). “*You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*” (Matthew 1:21)

Merry Christmas!

Amen.