

Christmas Eve Sermon - Luke 2:1-20

Many blessings to you on this Christmas Eve. I am glad that you and your family or visitors are with us this night.

Christmas Eve Service is one of my favorites next to Easter. A vulnerable child of God is born and laid in a manger. After nine months of the virgin Mary carrying the baby, nine months of dealing with the stigma of being unwed and pregnant, Jesus is born. Just like you and I, Jesus was born from the womb of a loving mother.

I can only imagine how Mary must have felt through all of this. First the angel Gabriel telling her a poor unwed teenager, that she would bear the Messiah; then the long journey to Bethlehem. Finding out there is no room at the inn and the stable would be the place she would give birth. She must of thought to herself, ok what next. That is, until Jesus was born. A vulnerable little baby born in a dirty stable. I have talked to women who have given birth to a child. They say that during the birth they lay in the most vulnerable state in such pain, that it is hard to find any joy in the birthing process. That is until the child is born. At that time all is forgotten and love overwhelms them. Just like us, when Jesus was born his parents probably checked for ten fingers and ten toes. I can see Mary putting out her finger and little Jesus wrapping his little hand around her pinky. I wonder whether Joseph and her sang to Jesus at his birth. No matter, the birth of Jesus was just like ours. All of us born of mothers and created in the image of God. All of us vulnerable and in need of care. Jesus however was born as the Son of God, with purpose. To be new hope for us. And later as an adult he will show us

a rebirth, from the vulnerable death on the cross to new life in the resurrection. God comes to us in love.

It is easy for me to stand up here and talk about the goodness of God. After we are all created in God's image. What can be better than that? We are chosen and created as his children. It begs the question though if we are created in his image why do we struggle so much with our emotions this time of year? I know year after year I talk with people who are living by themselves or are homebound about how lonely they are. They lack the personal stimulation. And boy, grief also has such an impact on how we feel at Christmas. There will be a lot of firsts for people this year. I buried 22 people this year. So, 22 families will be experiencing for the first time that special someone who has reached eternal life. It is so hard for people to admit that they are feeling lonely. We just don't talk about those feelings of vulnerability because often we are afraid to show our weakness. My response to that is bother people! We are family! Ask others if they have time to talk or visit. If you are feeling good about the season or anytime, ask those you think are perhaps lonely or still grieving if they would like some company. There is life in such interactions. Remember, "Wherever two or three are gathered, God is with you." Be Christ to others. Shine your light!

I encourage you to also shine your light in the community of Pembroke. Be vulnerable and take risks. It really isn't that hard to do. We are called to love because God loves everyone.

When I think of Jesus, the Son of God, laying in the manger wrapped in swaddling clothes I cannot help but think of those who are seeking shelter in our own

town. We cannot ignore the problem. The warming shelter near the Marina is there because of a great desire by a group of people to find warmth for the homeless. It is being used regularly. Unfortunately, there was a serious drug overdose in the bathroom recently. I speak of this not to label the individual who was struggling but to help people recognize them. This individual who was using the drugs, felt hopeless. It is not for us to blame or say, "See I knew that would happen there." Rather we need to be able to say, "He is a child of God. He is someone's child. He may be someone's father, or brother. He is a human being like you and I, worthy of God's unconditional love. To go to the warming center in the first place, individuals who have nowhere to stay warm in the winter months, they have to admit their vulnerability and need for help. It is our calling to be vulnerable and open our hearts to love people who are different than us. Jesus sure did.

That leads me to say: Christ IS Christmas... Christmas will *always* be about Christ. And we can commercialize it or Santa-ize it, or bake through it or shop through it... but we still can't TAKE Christ out of Christmas...

And do you know why? Because Christ can't take YOU out of Christmas... you are the reason there IS a Christmas- you're the reason that Jesus was sent here the first place- because of God's great love for you...because of God's love for US! "For God so loved the world that God gave God's only son!" For God so loved *each one* of us... because God loved, Jesus came to earth- bringing with him the foundations of everything he knows- love, peace, joy, hope...

And truly I tell you- that God loves you so very much- that tonight, and tomorrow and every single day that you are willing, (and even when you're not willing...) when you're stuffing turkeys and singing carols, or buying goats for families overseas, or just watching the game - whether you are thinking about Christ or not thinking about Christ... God is with us. Merry Christmas. Amen.