

Isaiah 9:1-11  
Titus 2:11-14  
Luke 2:1-20

Rev. Nathan Anderson  
Christmas Eve Service  
December 24, 2016

### The Lutheran Church of All Saints, Fox Lake, IL

The familiar Christmas story from Luke chapter 2 is an account I've heard every year of my life ... as is likely true for most of you. We would hear it on Christmas Eve or on Christmas Day in coming to worship at church. We heard it in Sunday School, and in countless Christmas programs and pageants. Perhaps you remember taking part in bringing this story to life ... as a shepherd or sheep, angel or king, the innkeeper, Mary or Joseph. Many families read it as part of the holiday meal they share.

We are part of this Nativity story ... and it's meant to become a part of us, a source of good news and great joy. It announces God's intention for all people, who are created in God's image, to bring peace, forgiveness, light, and love. There is a Latin phrase "Image Deo" which simply means "the image of God." We're reminded of the Genesis account of Creation which declares human beings are indeed made in God's image. Many parents recognize a baby as being a heavenly gift of life, sensing an intimacy of God's blessings and presence. Whether the child is perfectly healthy or has special needs, we know there can be great vulnerability, needing nurture and protection. Romans 3:23 describes how all people have fallen short of God's glory, and there is indeed a mix of halos and horns in each of us as we strive to find our place in this world. It can be hard to glimpse God's presence in such imperfect people in bondage to sin.

Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ as the only perfect child, the Light of the World sent into this world's darkness, the incarnation of God's Word made flesh, the Communion of heavenly and earthly kingdoms united in God's purposes. He was born for our sake, making it known how imperfect people are perfectly loved. The Lord believes in people who don't yet believe in Him. How will this be revealed? For most of us, it will begin to happen by telling a story ... sometimes personal stories of what we've experienced along the way in life and in faith, when we glimpsed extraordinary love, sacrifice, forgiveness and hope in ordinary settings and ordinary people. It's when we sense the stories of others somehow connect with our own stories, bringing us awareness and insights to reinterpret the blessings and burdens in our path. It takes great humility and humor to affirm what people have in common, when the world emphasizes our differences in competitive and combative ways.

Some people are convinced God is only found in perfection ... in great power ... and in splendor. God has all this and more ... but Scripture describes a Divine willingness to empty God's self to take on the humility of human form in becoming one of us. It takes a leap of faith to recognize Emmanuel ... how God is with us ... in the ordinary days of life. Most of us notice what wrong with a situation and with other people. It's frustrating enough to deal with our own imperfections. Can we learn to accept, to forgive, to encourage, to teach and role-model the aspirations of our hopes and faith in our relationship with others? Will we let the light of our haloes shine, or will we sharpen our horns to wound a weary and dark world?

Personally, I think worldly definitions of perfection are over-rated. I like to do the best I can ... inhibited by time, energy and money, certainly. Perhaps it's for the best, as going overboard is simply another temptation. Getting back to basics is a good thing ... returning to the original storyline and purpose. Perhaps it will be a child who reminds us of what's important ... who helps us recognize what's good instead of focusing on what's bad ... who brings light into our darkness ... whose tears and laughter brings us in touch with our own. Will it be a young child ... or an older, vintage child of God? We are all God's children.

By telling the Christmas story ... we weave in a part of ourselves and our stories, traditions, and memories. It joins us with generations of storytellers and witnesses of faith who've been trail blazers in the journey and identity as a church family. Personally, I love to see the Sunday School pageants each year in which children become the storytellers of God's Word. The lines don't have to be perfectly delivered, nor the music perfect pitch. When adults demonstrate their pride and joy in what the children have shared, another link of faith is forged in the Communion of Saints to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, and God's Word is made flesh.

I'd like to share a Christmas pageant video with you in which the adults of one congregation strove to act out the nativity story with humility and humor exactly the way the kids in their church told it. The YouTube was created by Southland Christian Church in Lexington, Kentucky. May it bring you much Christmas joy, and a reminder of blessings to remember:

<https://youtu.be/suowe2czxcA>

Out of the mouths of babes! The role of Mary was portrayed by the congregation's creative director Mary Wahlbrink, who had simply asked the parents of the children to review the Christmas story at home before filming their own narration. There have been over 40 million FaceBook viewings, and even more on YouTube! Praise the Lord ... as the original story of Christmas, the reason for the season, continues to link us all together in celebrating the birthday of Jesus. May we each find ways to proclaim Christ is born in the manger of our hearts and share a glimpse of Emmanuel's presence in this life we share ... in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Merry Christmas!