

Pastor Jon's Christmas Eve Sermon on December 24, 2021

Text: Luke 2:1-20.

Merry Christmas to you All!

Children really seem to get the wonder of Christmas... don't they? It reminds me of the movie Elf starring Will Farrell. I just love Elf's childlike excitement over all things Christmas. My favorite scene is the snowball scene, where they are chucking snowballs at each other. I heard of this great in-gathering in Oregon where I used to serve. The theater would show the movie Elf and people would bring new socks for homeless as the admission price. During the snowball fight, people could ball up socks and have a snowball fight. Then after they would go to local shelters.

Children have this amazing sense of joy and anticipation in the season. For our household, it started when Santa came around Neenah on a flatbed with lights and a sleigh, a siren, and a microphone wishing us a Merry Christmas... and telling us to be good while we wait.

But then there is the waiting itself. You have all this anticipation and then you have to wait.

I have been thinking a lot about waiting this year. It seems we are all waiting for something. Have you noticed we are waiting more and more at local businesses who are having a hard time getting workers? People waiting longer than ever in the queue at the ER. People are waiting for test results and medical procedures. We are all waiting for this pandemic to be over. Two years is a long time, but we have to keep the faith and move forward with life.

But think of Jesus' birth. Mary, engaged to Joseph, heard the proclamation of the Angel Gabriel, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus". Mary waited 9 months for this promise to come true.

Then it came time for Jesus' birth. A decree went out from Emperor Augustus that the whole world should be registered in their home

town for Roman tax purposes. This would place Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. It would fulfill the prophecy of the prophet Micah made 800 years earlier that "help" would come in a baby born in Bethlehem. Imagine waiting 800 years.

And then Jesus was born... with all the sights, sounds, and smells of human birth, Jesus was wrapped in bands of cloth, and laid in a manger. What kind of royal birth was this? God chooses to come to earth and save us in the lowliest of ways... as a vulnerable baby... born in a manger... a place where the animals slept and fed.

And then on top of that, the angels chose lowly shepherds tending their flocks at night to be the first to hear of this royal birth and spread the news. The angels said to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." They went with haste to look for the sign of a baby wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

The world waited for this promise of peace and joy to come to fruition on the ground as they continued to graze their sheep and wait for this Messiah to grow up. Jesus began his public ministry 30 years later. More waiting.

But sometimes the hope promised by God involves us waiting. When God makes a promise, God keeps it. So we wait with hope and expectation.

This is where faith comes in. I said earlier that children really seem to get the wonder of Christmas. This is how we are to approach Jesus' birth... like a child at Christmas. Jesus says in Mark 10:14, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

Jesus is telling us to be like little children. He isn't talking about being innocent like a little child. Jesus is talking about having faith or trust in God like a child. Children had to depend on others to survive. Children were vulnerable and needed others to feed them and care for them. The Christmas story invites us to believe in God's promise to

save the world in the baby Jesus Christ. The hope we have in Jesus is wrapped up in the package of our faith and baptism.

And finally, God's gift in Jesus isn't about being naughty or nice. The doctrine of original sin says that we all are naughty even though we do our best to be nice. But God got it right for us in Jesus. our God is a God of grace.

So this Christmas, let us accept this gift with the wonder and excitement of a child. Even in our waiting, God has promised us hope in the future... even if we can't see it now. God promises to be with us in our waiting. And like the shepherds, let us go forth glorifying and praising what God has done for us.