

Pastor Jon's Christmas Eve Sermon 2023

Merry Christmas!

How about a little Holy Humor?

A little girl and her younger brother were sitting with their family in church on Christmas Eve singing Silent Night to candlelight. The boy concluded the first verse of "Silent Night" with the words, "Sleep in heavenly beans." (you know the vegetable). His sister elbowed him and whispered, "No, it's not heavenly beans, it's heavenly peas." silly

Have you watched or read *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* this year? That story never gets old to me. And apparently neither to Hollywood. It's gotta be that image of the people of Whoville holding hands and dancing and singing on Christmas morning despite all the packages, trees, and decorations missing. The Grinch got it wrong. After thinking he got rid of Christmas once and for all, he woke up to all the Christmas joy and wondered to himself:

"Hmm... It came without ribbons, it came without tags. It came without packages, boxes, or bags."

"Maybe Christmas doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!"

That's it. Christmas does mean a little bit more. That's why we're here tonight.

Like I told the children, God came to earth as a baby born in a manger out of love for the entire globe... for everyone and everything **as is**. John 3:16 stuff. God gave the gift of Jesus out of grace for us humans, who have a tendency to mess things up. Would you agree? What do you need grace for tonight? It's here in the manger, in simple bread and wine!

But, simply by believing in Jesus we have the promise of eternal life... both now and after we die. Now? According to John's Gospel, in John 17:3, Jesus prays at the Last Supper for those who will come after him... the church... for us "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent."

Knowing Jesus is eternal life. It is grace, forgiveness, healing, justice and love all wrapped up in one child.

When Jesus was born, angels appeared to the lowly shepherds saying, “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.” A sign will be a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

Did you catch that? The original wrapping paper at Christmas was swaddling clothes. Babies were swaddled to hopefully calm them... and give them the peace of being in their mother’s womb. May you be swaddled in Christ’s peace tonight and every night.

When the shepherds arrived and told Mary and Joseph what had been told them about this child, Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. God coming down as a human is hard to wrap your head around.

Martin Luther once said: “The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding.”

But Luke tells us that Jesus’ birth is good news of great joy for all the people. The word I am meditating on this Christmas is “All”. All the people. For you and me and our neighbors across the globe.

In Micah chapter 5 the prophet says a new king will be born in Bethlehem in the line of David: “But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth from me one who is to rule Israel... he shall lead his flock... he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.”

Bethlehem. Bethlehem today is shrouded in the darkness of war between Israel and Hamas. But wasn’t Jesus born into a messy political world dominated by the Roman Empire?

So, as we navigate our fallen world filled with messy politics, wars, hatred, violence, and disease, Just know that Jesus is the life and light of all people that no darkness can overcome. And one by one, Jesus and his followers won people over through his love and teaching that all people matter, and all people deserve healing and dignity. Let it be so!

Merry Christmas!