

Sermon Text for Christmas Day 2016

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Isaiah 7:10-14, Matthew 1:18-25

Christmas – The rest of the story

We find ourselves on the others side of the preparations for Advent on the actual Christmas Day. Isn't it interesting how we build up for Advent and then when the actual day comes it is toned down, we only have one service, the preparations and the planning were primarily on the season before Christmas, not the actual Christmas Day, not the actual day of the birth which we celebrate. I think that is the way it should be. Christmas Day was a bit of a dénouement. We had our Christmas pageant last night. What a celebration, what great joy to see all the kids gathered around to receive their gifts.

I know I told this story before but it was my dad's favorite, it has been a couple years since I told it. It is the story of the little boy in the Christmas pageant who was the angel Gabriel and his job was to tell Mary that she was expecting a child. It was the Luke version and the one line that he had was: You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son. He worked on it and he was pretty confident that he knew it. The time came in the play, out he flew dramatically and then he completely blanked, he had no idea what his lines were, but he had a general idea of what he was supposed to say so he pointed at Mary and said: Zap, you're pregnant. A supernatural conception.

Yesterday we saw Christmas- The Story. There is a singular point to Matthew's Christmas story. That singular point is that Jesus came to save us from our sin. That is why he was named Jesus, which is short for Joshua in Hebrew and which means God saves. Jesus, is our Savior, he came to save us from our sin. There is no more complexity to the Christmas story than that. Today though, we find the Rest of the story. We recognize that things aren't always as simple as they appear. The straightforward approach of retelling the Christmas story by Matthew is wonderfully innocent, but it leave almost more questions than it gives answers. We live in a complicated world. Jesus lived in a complicated world. Let's hear now about Christmas, the rest of the story.

For a certain generation the words: "The rest of the story", elicit sentimental feelings of Paul Harvey and his telltale sign off of: "Good Day!" For those of you who didn't experience is storytelling he would take a story that at times might be well known or tossed around in the news and he would put his own particular slant on it from information that he gathered here and there.

I know what you are thinking, sounds like fake news to me. No, it was real news, it was told not to cast doubt or suspicion on anyone or any cause. It was to shed light and in most cases to proclaim good news. It made us feel good. It was mostly good news. Christmas is a story of good news, or as the angels told the shepherds in Luke, good news of great joy.

We heard the Christmas story last night. It was a simple story but with plot twists and turns, intrigue, and a protagonist who makes the right decision at the right time. It was all very exciting and all very simple and in the end the good guys win. A baby is born into a loving family. That's the story. This baby is the Savior of the World. This baby came to forgive us of our sins.

Paul Harvey throughout his broadcast would say consistently, did you know, and did you know that...If we look at our Old Testament Scripture we begin to see the rest of the story. In Matthew we find this Scripture that we read quoted by the Gospel writer. So Ahaz is the king of Israel and things are about to go terribly bad but the Lord wants to save Israel and do it in a way that the people would recognize that it was the Lord who conquered. So he tells the king, ask for a sign, any sign that you want, and I will bring it about, I will make it happen. Ahaz is a stubborn king, and he says no, I am not going to ask you for a sign, I refuse to do it, because I am not going to tempt the Lord my God. Ahaz the king talks back to God and in some ways uses God's own words from the 10 commandments, do not tempt the Lord your God, back in God's face. It is interesting to note that Jesus uses these same words when he is tempted in the wilderness and says to Satan, you shall not tempt the Lord your God.

So God gets frustrated and says I'm going to give you a sign anyway. The sign is that the young girl will have a baby and that baby's name is going to be Immanuel. The baby himself will be a sign that God is with us, that's what his name means, God is with us. It gets complicated because when Matthew takes this Isaiah Scripture he interprets the word *almah* in Hebrew which means girl to *parthena* in Greek which means virgin. It isn't his fault, that is what all the translations of the Old Testament in Greek had, they had virgin. But the original language, the Hebrew, had young girl. It doesn't matter, but it does matter to Matthew.

You see, Jesus' birth as the Messiah, as the one who was foretold from the prophet Isaiah, needs to be an act of great continuity between the Old and the New Testaments. Mary had to be a virgin not only when she conceived, but also when Jesus was born, it was the only thing that makes sense in the story. But it is complicated.

The rest of the story we find in vs.25 where Matthew tells us that they had no marital relations until Jesus was born. The virginity of Mary, the pureness, was important to maintain before Jesus was born. Jesus was virgin born. But there is nothing wrong with a married couple having relations, it is not defiling, it is what God wants, it is part of his plan. Paul speaks of it often and says not to deny each other that part of a relationship which is a natural beautiful part. Hey, I didn't bring up this subject, Matthew did. This is the rest of the story, of the Christmas story, right. But you see Jesus was 100% human and 100% God and none of that depended on Mary's virginity or anything about us at all.

Look at vs.20 and you see the angel tell Mary that the child that has been conceived in her. We take a passive role in God's plans, even in this instance. Even if the angel told Joseph three times in his dreams to go and do, we still take the passive role and respond to the initiative of God. We did not initiate God's hand in this and God initiates the action in the Christmas story. A key part to the Christmas story is the fact that the angel comes to Mary and Joseph and says: this is what is going to happen. It is up to you to be a part of it or not. Mary says: I am the handmaiden of the Lord, Joseph wakes up from his dream and does exactly what the Lord commanded him to do. But it is God, not us, who initiates.

I think of Jesus in the Gospel of John who is sitting in the dirt drawing on the ground when the adulterous woman is brought to him. I wonder if he is thinking about his own mother who according to law should have been in the same position as this woman was now in. In fact, when that story ends he looks up and looks into the eyes of this adulterous woman and calls her: woman, the same title that he calls his mother both at his first miracle in Cana in turning the water to wine as well as on the cross when he gives her over to the disciple that he loved.

The rest of the story of Christmas is complicated, but it is reality. There is a greyness to Christmas that reflects the world we live in. Things didn't just turn out and Jesus wasn't just born. Herod sent soldiers and slaughtered a generation of boys. Our life is complicated, a modern day slaughter is happening in Aleppo and we are doing nothing, which makes us complicated. This Christmas morning we come here to hear the Christmas story, and today I hope you heard the rest of the story. Jesus came to save us from our sins, that is the story. The rest of the story is that the Word, God incarnate, became flesh and dwelt among us, Jesus was one of us and lived in this complicated mixed up world, so that we would have God with us. The rest of the story is Good news, it is great news. Good day! Amen.