

# Sermon Text for December 23, 2018

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Isaiah 7:11-17, Luke 2:7, Titus 2:11-14

## *“A simple story”*

Our last Sunday in Advent. Everyone is home at the Bronkema household. For us, at least, the season of anticipation is over, the family is reunited, yet today in church we still are in the now and the now yet. We are still in Advent, waiting with anticipation the coming of our Savior. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus, come. That is what we ask this Advent season. But our Scriptures today remind us not to forget Emmanuel, God is with us. We have had an exciting and fulfilling Advent season at the church and it all comes to a head on Christmas Eve. This morning we are going to hear the Christmas story as told by Luke even while we prepare for Christ in Advent, let's hear it in chapter 2:7. It is a simple story really. In the bleak midwinter a baby boy was born. Nobody was paying attention to the young girl in labor out in the barn. All the rooms were filled with revelers. Luke adds no miracle, no decorations, no fanfare, just the earthy, stark facts. “She gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” One simple verse in Luke, that's all it took.

In the midst of this simplicity, our Savior is born. Today, we find Christ and Mary and Joseph all around us. They've added the animals, the shepherds, the kings to Luke's one verse. Some have even thrown in Santa for good measure. This past week with the fever pitch of Christmas everyone is thinking about the birth of Christ. What a change from that ignominious birth to today, a public, celebrated worldwide event. For a few precious hours the world on Tuesday will behold the birth of Christ. Christ is everywhere from Strasburg PA to Strasbourg France, from Syria to Afghanistan, from China to India. The world is hearing the Christ story. I pray that those who seek him today in December, will continue to seek him and turn to him in August.

Our New Testament reading for today comes from Paul's letter to Titus. I know, it doesn't sound like a typical Christmas story, or even an Advent reading, but it is. It is matched with our Isaiah Scripture which is the most famous of Old Testament Scriptures that we normally read around this time of year. But our New Testament reading reminds us in very simple terms of this anticipation that we have been speaking about for these past three weeks. We started off in November by encouraging ourselves to tithe for the month of January, then we started off Advent by reminding us to keep awake. Then we

asked ourselves if we still had the Spirit of Advent, this Spirit which gives us a sense of anticipation for the coming of Jesus. We expect Jesus to come. And then last week we asked if we had a confidence in God that comes from knowing for sure that Jesus is coming back and when we have that confidence which was seen in Mary then we know that all things are possible with God.

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

Hold this reading and the reading that we did in Luke in tension and look at their simplicity. It all started as a simple story. Have you ever thought to yourself, what would it have been like to be Mary? I would like to sit down and interview Mary and ask her some question? I would like to ask her:

-How did Jesus respond when he was growing up when he saw other kids giggling during the service at the temple?

-Did you ever feel awkward teaching him how he created the world?

-How did he act at funerals?

-Did the thought ever occur to you that the God to whom you were praying was asleep under your own roof?

-Did you ever try to count the stars with him...and succeed?

-Did he ever come home with a black eye?

-How did he act when he got his first haircut?

-Did he do well in school?

-Did you ever have to scold him?

-Did he ever wake up afraid?

-What did he and his cousin John talk about as kids?

Without a doubt the birth of Jesus in that simple nondescript way changed the world. But today we are going to ask a much more personal question. Did that simple story change us? It may have changed the course of history, but did it change our story, did it change us? Paul's letter to Titus tells us that the incarnation, our God becoming one of us when he was born on that Christmas morning was so that we would live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly. The birth of Christ should impact our character. Not only who we are as redeemed sinners but how we act as result of that redemption. The birth and the cross are meant to ultimately make us better people so we can lead useful lives in God's glory.

This sounds like a really bad recipe for a moralizing sermon. I am not a big fan of a sermon just giving you a scolding that you need to be better people and you need to be

nicer to your neighbor. There is so much more to our Christian life, and I hope that I have been able to teach you through my sermons the necessity of having a personal relationship with Jesus because it has eternal meaning. We do not know Christ just to be good people. That is not our end goal. But here Titus says, it may not be our end goal, but it does have to be one of our goals. You can't love Christ and hate your neighbor. The end goal is to love Christ, that is our end goal. It is not just to be good people. But Titus tells us that if you love Christ, you will be a person who takes seriously the commandment that you ought to love other people.

Again Paul tells us in his letter to Titus that this transformation should create a people who are zealous for good deeds. These are the fruits of repentance that we have been talking about these last few weeks. Zealous is a word that today is frowned upon. In light of Islamic, Jewish and Christian zealots whose sole purpose it is to inflict death to those who do not think like they do. Yet Christ himself states that the zeal of the house of my father consumes me. Zeal, passion, energy, is a good thing when it is directed toward good works. In fact, it is what Christ expects when we reflect upon the simple story of Christ being laid in a manger. It should arouse zeal in us to do good works.

This gift of God, this giving of himself to us constrains us to give ourselves wholly to him. This simple story is all about our salvation. Jesus came to bring salvation to all. Look at vs.1 where we read that the grace of God appeared bringing salvation to all. This is the Advent hope that we have. Jesus has come bringing salvation to all. He came so that we would receive him, even though the world has turned its back to him. He came so that when we receive him our character would be changed and we would be zealous for good deeds. There is a reason why God sent us a Savior for our sin, because we needed one.

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior.

The birth of Christ proves that God loves each of us like there was only one of us. This Advent, as the world around you has been transformed, allow this simple story to transform you personally. Purify yourself today, Jesus is coming back in just two days, and change your character so that it more closely reflects the one who very simply was born and then laid in a manger, yet changed the world. Amen.