

# Sermon Text for December 11, 2022

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*Isaiah 53:4-6, Matthew 1:18-25*

## *Who Christmas?*

I'm afraid some of you might be disappointed because when you saw the title of the sermon you were thinking that I was going to give an in-depth explanation of Dr. Seuss' Who's with a special emphasis on the heroine Cindy Lou Who. But alas, that is not my purpose this morning. If you have been following along you would know that we have been looking at the Ws of Christmas. While we are fully aware that we find ourselves in the midst, and now approaching the end of the Advent season we are hoping that a focus on the meaning of Christmas would engender a deeper anticipation and expectation for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ.

We have seen What Christmas and pointed to Emmanuel, God with us. We looked last week at Why Christmas and directed our gaze to sin and the need for a Savior. Today, Who Christmas, who was this person born in a manger and what was his family like and what were the circumstances around his birth which we say we celebrate on Christmas Day. I am afraid that what we find represented around us in regards to the details and the Who, the individual on Christmas morning more closely resembles a fairytale than it does the account that we read in Scripture.

In reality Jesus was born in a messy context, in a messy family, in a messy physical setting. There is nothing antiseptic about Jesus birth. I'm sure they had to boil their water to drink it as well. What I hope we will see as we look at the Who of Christmas is that we ought to be grateful to have a God who loves us in the midst of our messiness. Let's read.

## **READ**

So what is your vision of Christmas? So many of us this season just feel warm and fuzzy. There are also many of us that this Christmas is an especially difficult one with a loved one no longer around the table or the house. But for the most part churches and we included, create a fantasyland around Christmas. The decorations, the pageants, the music, the warmth. There is nothing wrong with joy, in fact I have stressed repeatedly from this pulpit that joy is a necessary and primary attribute of a follower of Jesus Christ. No joy, no Jesus. So, there is nothing wrong with our vision of Christmas containing and overabundance of joy. I want people to be happy.

We see in Luke the shepherds who after seeing Jesus left to tell others with great joy. This is a part of the Christmas story, let me be clear about this. But this is pretty much all we emphasize of the Christmas story. There is so much more to the story and there is so much more that we never even mention. We will today in the Who Christmas as we look at the birth of Jesus, Christmas day, in the midst of a less than ideal physical, social, familial reality.

Let's turn to Isaiah where we read about the person who would be the Messiah, the Christ, and what it would be like when he walked upon the earth. This suffering servant Scripture depicts the type of life, and I would also argue the type of birth, that the Word made flesh would experience. Isaiah portrays a Jesus that truly was a who, a person, that is very different from what we normally see on Christmas and in this time leading up to Christmas. Look at those verses again, let's turn there.

We don't see an innocent superhero that we would want or come to expect. Rather, we find a person wounded, crushed and bruised. We know why he went through that and we heard it in the why of Christmas, because we are sinners so he had to be broken. We know what this represents and means for us, it means that Emmanuel, God is with us and chose to be in relationship with us. But the who is a bit more mercurial and even troubling. But we find it here, a bruised, broken, disease ridden, afflicted and struck down individual. What would it look like to come and adore him?

This word became flesh, the what, points to a flesh that suffers and is abused. When Jesus came and was born among us the mess of this world is fully caught up in the person of Jesus. He was not immune to it and he did not live above it. He lived in it. So when we ask the question who was Jesus we can start by saying, well, he came from a messy background. It is that background that Matthew tells us about. Let's turn to Matthew.

The Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy which traces Jesus' family tree through Joseph all the way through David and eventually Abraham. So without a doubt Jesus did not come from nowhere, he came from somewhere and that was from a pretty important family. So this story of the birth of Jesus ought to be considered a continuation of this genealogy. Matthew tells us of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus and these events are not clean at all, they are very messy. He provides us with some of the less sanitized description of the birth of Jesus than any other Gospel. He doesn't shy away from portraying a Jesus who is born in a context that is messy and not perfect.

The entire story is problematic. It begins with the genealogy containing two foreigners and one is a prostitute in Rahab. We then find a child conceived out of wedlock and we know

that in that culture, as in all cultures, this child would never lose that stigma. Forever Jesus would carry that with him and forever he would be viewed as that kid, as if there were something wrong with him. Jesus was not untouched by the messiness of his world or the messiness of his family.

Does this resonate with us at all. Sometimes we think that when we find ourselves in a mess, either because of decisions that we have made, or decisions that others have made that affect us and impact us, we think that we are on our own in trying to deal with them. But what we find in Matthew is that in the midst of what can be nicely described as a complicated situation, or what I would call a mess, we find God at work bringing about redemption. Joseph found himself in a situation where he was going to have to separate from Mary because there was a complication. The angel, the messenger of God said no, this child who is going to be born, this individual, is going to come out of this situation in a way that has planned.

We can never think that there is any situation in our life that is too messy for God to take control of. There is never anything in our life that is ours alone to handle. Never, this story of the Who Christmas, God born in the mess of life, is the strongest example that we could ever find of this. There is a part of us that wants to sanitize the Who Christmas because we see our own lives and we recognize that there is nothing neat and orderly about our own lives. Our own lives are messy and God made flesh, Emmanuel, lives in the midst of our sin which is the messiest part of our life.

In Isaiah 53:6 we find a clear reference to the why Christmas where we read that the Lord has laid on him the iniquity, the sin of us all. Matthew makes his way through these questions himself but he begins with the Why in vs. 21 where Joseph is commanded to name this child born Jesus. Jesus which means God save, God redeems us from our sins, God has come to save us from our sins. He then in vs.23 covers the What Christmas when the angel tells Joseph that the birth of Jesus from the virgin Mary is the presence of Emmanuel, God with us. And as we read that then we get into the mess of things in vs.24 where we see that Joseph decides to not divorce Mary, to stay with her and then eventually in vs.25 we see him claim Jesus, this child conceived out of wedlock, as his son, even though biologically he was not his son.

I don't want anyone ever again to wonder if God is present in the mess of our lives. We worship a God who chose to live in the mess of this world and understands the messiness of our lives. We create a false pure Christmas because it provides us with joy, that's okay, we want to sanitize the Who, Jesus it fits our version, our idealized version of the Christmas story. Can God be present in our mess? Can a drug user give life to four people upon their death through organ

donation? Jesus did not come from a clean sanitized family with no mess. No, Jesus knew what it meant to carry the stigma of messiness his whole life, even to the cross itself, the greatest shame of them all.

So what do we hide and pretend because we can't believe God would have anything to say or anything to do with it? Joseph in Matthew, is taken on a journey, one that begins with confusion then leads to trust and then eventually to enlightenment. But it was a journey. Our journey this Sunday has to begin with the Who of Christmas, Jesus, the babe born in a dirty manger to a family that was deeply flawed, and yet chose to live among us. Amen.