

Luke 2:1-20
Christmas Eve

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Greetings you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you.

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The memory is a dozen years old now, but vivid. I couldn't tell you what it was like outside, but I remember that room. I even remember what I was wearing. But even more clearly, I remember what my son looked like – a pudgy little nine-month old, in a hospital gown, snot dripping from his nose, coughing non-stop. He had pneumonia. It was awful. We were first time parents; trying to deal with a sickness we couldn't seem to do anything about. All day long, nurses had been in and out poking him for one reason or another. There were eight failed attempts to find a vein in his chubby arms into which to insert the IV. He was miserable and terrified and confused as he looked up at us as yet another person in a white coat stuck a needle in his arm – and that baby in the hospital bed could not figure out why daddy wouldn't stop this.

To that point in my life, I had never felt a feeling like that. I don't think I was capable of it. I wanted to offer my arm for those needles so he wouldn't have to scream and suffer anymore, but that wouldn't have done any good.

Then, I remember later that night, when he was lying on that hospital bed with a tent over him filled with some kind of medicated air, still just as scared as before, still just as confused, still just as amazed. And I still felt that indescribable feeling in my heart, my gut. He was scared. He was helpless. He needed help. I didn't know what to do, but I had to do something. So I somehow crawled this big body up on that little hospital bed and squeezed up under that little tent with him, so that I could hold my son and tell him: "It's OK. Daddy's here. It's OK. I'm here."

Tonight, you and I hear that same thing from God. "It's OK. I'm here." But the thing is, from him, they aren't just words. When I climbed up under that tent, that's all I had – words. I could not take away one single bacteria. I could not give him one ounce of health or physical help. I couldn't take away any of his pain. But God, when he comforts us, his presence changes everything.

Because he comes with power. Think about that. You know the power of the Christmas story – even the angel messengers who came to announce this arrival of God into human flesh – what's the first thing they had to say whenever they appeared? "**Do not be afraid.**" The power of their very presence was so overwhelming that anyone to whom they appeared would naturally be terrified. So they have to ease that – "Don't be afraid...I come with good news."

And that's just the messengers announcing it. Look at the actual arrival; look at the power play you see in the details of the text, this story of God's Son's birth. God played the world superpower like a pawn in a chess match and used him to rearrange the world's population: "**In those days**" the text says, the mightiest ruler there was, "**Caesar Augustus, issued a decree that a census should be taken**" - and the world had to move – all so that God could make his entrance according to his promise in that little town of Bethlehem. And then, as if that weren't enough, God shows his power over the very laws of nature as the *virgin* was with child and gave birth to a Son. In that hospital, I could just say some words. God's presence changes things. He's got the power to do what he came to do.

So I guess that's the next question: What did he come to do as he came with his power? Really, the last thing we'd be expecting him to say is: "It's OK. I'm here." Right? Let's be honest with ourselves. When God looks at this world he created, when he looks at us humans,

the crown of his creation, created to give him glory with our every breath – what does he see? He sees a population so selfish, so self-focused, spending so much breath trying to glorify ourselves, that all too often we can't even see Him - God. We live our lives as if he's not here, doing whatever we please and trying to tell ourselves that God would be OK with that. We live as if he's not in control, worrying and stressing, and looking to ourselves for solutions God has already given. He sees you when you hold a grudge because you don't like how someone else treated you; they didn't put you first. He sees you when you look out for your own interests before the interests of others. He sees you when you run out of funds to take care of your responsibilities because you came across something you *really* wanted, or just refused to practice self-control with the so many things you don't need. You think Santa sees you when you're bad or good? Try God.

So now, when we hear that Christmas is all about God coming to us... After all, the angel announced that Christ the **Lord** had come, the **Lord**, the God of all power and control... when we hear that that is who is coming, that could be a pretty scary thing. We can relate to that powerless little kid on the bed terrified of the next adult that comes into that room, until we see that this God of power who comes, comes with His love.

There's a story that gets forwarded on emails every year this time of year about a man who tries to rescue a cat that is injured and hungry and scared. When he goes to pick it up to help – it slashes him with its claws, making a pretty significant scar. It takes everything in the man's power not to club the cat back – but he doesn't. Instead, he brings the cat food and earns its trust to the point when he can bring it home and adopt it as the family pet. And as the years go by, every time he sees the scar on the arm that is holding that cat that loves him so much, he's reminded of the love it took to overcome the hostility and build that relationship with that pet.

In a way, we were that scared cat, with nothing to offer, needing pity, striking out at the very One who could help. God took the scars it took to show us love. And as we look at our text we see example after example of how this birth in Bethlehem happened all to fulfill the promises of our Savior who would take the scars our sins caused. Here we see the promises fulfilled; those comforting words God had been giving us to show us His love, to let us know it would be OK. God's Son was born in Bethlehem just like he said, born of a virgin just like he promised, announced by angels. And look at what they announced: **Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.**"

The Christ – the Messiah – the promised Savior that would crush Satan's head while his own heel would be struck. That is the one who is born. As we sang in the carols before the service – "*Mortals, now be still and ponder rhapsodies transcending earth. Angels sing the glory-wonder: Christ descends to such a birth. Depth of love we cannot fathom, God declares we have such worth*". He loved us so much that he entered as he did – not to destroy us, but to restore us, to love us, to make us his own.

Look at how the angel makes that clear: **"This will be the sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."** As God enters our world, the sign would not be trumpets and thunder claps, the sign would not be beams of light shining from His face or consuming fire destroying all who crossed him. The sign would be that God would so humble himself, that the one who created the world became a creature, that the one who spins the planets and hurls the comets, who holds the seas in their shores and the stars in the skies couldn't even hold the weight of his own head and needed to be cradled by a teenage girl. He took the swaddling clothes of a pauper so that he could wear the strips of linen in his grave – so that by his work, we could wear robes of righteousness.

God climbed into our world, and with more love than that clunky dad in the tiny kid-sized hospital bed can even comprehend, he actually fixed our problems. He removed every reason for fear. He restored our Hope and healed all our diseases. God's love made his word true. It is OK. He's here.

So this Christmas, as you look at that child – not the one in the hospital bed – the one in the manger: hear the message of the angel. In the midst of all the commotion of this world and the distraction of your busy lives, hear the message of Christmas. **“Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ, the Lord.”** “It's OK. He is here.” Joy to the world. The Lord is come. Let earth receive her king.

Merry Christmas

In Christ,

Amen.