

Christmas 2016: Holy Trinity Church: Luke 2: 1-20

That's What Christmas Is All About, Charlie Brown

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Every now and then, I come across something on the Internet that simply has to be shared, even on Christmas Eve/Day. This commentary was obviously written by a woman. Her claim is that all the reindeer that pull Santa's sleigh on Christmas Eve have to be females. She says the following, Think about it for a moment. According to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, both male and female reindeer grow antlers in the summer each year. However, male reindeer lose their antlers at the beginning of winter, usually in late November to mid-December. Female reindeer, on the other hand retain their antlers until after they give birth in the spring. She concludes, since all the male reindeer have lost their antlers by December 24 each year, and since all depictions of Santa's reindeer show them with antlers, all of Santa's reindeer, every single one of them, from Rudolph to Blitzen, had to be female." Then

she puts the icing on the cake, “We should have known; only women would be able to drag a fat man in a red velvet suit all around the world in one night and not get lost.” You know my sisters and brothers, I never knew women innately possessed On Star turn by turn navigation. Who knew!

At the 4 o’clock Family Mass our boys and girls in the Christmas Pageant are so looking forward to Santa’s visit later tonight. That’s part of what makes this the greatest night of the year. And that’s why we are turning to one of the grandest stories in all of human literature and that is Luke’s version of the telling of the Christmas story..

Can there possibly be a more beautiful story? This is the night for pure, unadulterated joy. How can anyone be a Grinch? It doesn’t get any better than this in this world. Families gathering together, children fidgeting with wide-eyed expectancy, churches filled for candle-lit services, the pageantry, the music, the color, the well-wishes, the hugs and kisses. It doesn’t get any better. It’s Christmas. A humble couple awaits the birth of their first son in a stable in Bethlehem. Overhead angels sing glory to God in the highest.

My brothers and sisters, this is our faith at its most basic. This is hope at its most triumphant. This is the birth of the Christ Child. This is the birth of our Savior and there is nothing else like it. If you were to ask most parents, “What

was the most important event in their lives?” a significant number would answer “the birth of our children.” What can bring more joy into our lives than the birth of a child? Oh, I know, there can also be heartbreak, but on this night of nights we focus on the joy that the baby in Bethlehem brought into the world over 2,000 years ago.

“Oh, little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie . . .” It is appropriate that Christ should be born in this small town which lies about six miles outside of Jerusalem. Bethlehem had a long history. Bethlehem was home of David, the man after God’s own heart, and the great king of Israel. Joseph was a descendant of David and the prophet Micah foretold that the Messiah would be born in the city of David, Bethlehem. This is part of the romance of Christmas. The Christ Child wasn’t born into Caesar’s household and palace. He wasn’t even born in the holy city of Jerusalem. He was born in the little backwater town of Bethlehem. He wasn’t born into an elite family. He was born to a poor couple, a couple who had to make a hard and difficult and dangerous journey almost to the very moment of his birth. His crib was a rough trough from which cattle fed. Millions of poor, weary and oppressed people around the world find hope for their lives from the story of Christ’s birth. It would not be the same if he had been born in a palace. The humble baby who is a king was born in a stable in Bethlehem to a poor couple who

could not find lodging at an inn. The Word of God through whom all things were created, Heaven and Earth and the entire universe and everyone and everything in it is lying in a rough cattle trough. God, the "Great I am" is lying in a manger. Oh, how the story inspires our imaginations. Oh how it so tugs upon our hearts.

Dr. James Alan Francis in "The Real Jesus and Other Sermons" titled "Arise Sir Knight!" writes about this one solitary life. A child is born in an obscure village. He is brought up in another obscure village. He works in a carpenter shop until he is thirty, and then for three brief years is an itinerant preacher, proclaiming a message and living a life. He never writes a book. He never holds an office. He never raises an army. He never has a family of his own. He never owns a home. He never goes to college. He never travels two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He gathers a little group of friends about him and teaches them his way of life. While still a young man, the tide of popular feeling turns against him. One denies him; another betrays him. He is turned over to his enemies. He goes through the mockery of a trial; he is nailed to a cross between two thieves, and when dead is laid in a borrowed grave by the kindness of a friend. Those are the facts of his human life. He rises from the dead. Today we look back across over 2,000 years ago and ask, what kind of trail has he left across the centuries? When we try to sum up his

influence, all the armies that ever marched, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned are absolutely picayune in their influence on mankind compared with that of this one solitary life...

My brothers and sisters in Christ, approaching the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem you come to a great wall, and in the wall there is a door so low that you have to stoop to enter it. Through the door, on the other side of the wall, there is the Church of the Nativity. Beneath the high altar of the church is a little grotto about fourteen yards long and four yards wide lit by silver lamps. In the floor there is a 14 pointed Silver Star, and around that star is this Latin inscription: *Hic De Virgine Maria Jesus Christus Natus Est.* Translation, *Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.*”

The great theologian, William Barclay writes the following, “When the Lord of Glory came to this earth, He was born in a cave where men sheltered the beasts. The cave in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem may be that same cave, or it may not be. That we will never know for certain. But there is something beautiful in the symbolism that the church where the cave is has a door so low that all must stoop to enter. It is supremely fitting that every person should approach the Infant Jesus upon their knees.”

This is not a night for pretentiousness. This is not a night for congratulating ourselves on how successful we have become or how many beautiful presents we will give or receive. This is a night for bowing in humility before the cradle of the Son of God who gave up everything on our behalf. And this is a night for receiving His peace and love. Christ emptied himself completely when he came into our world. My sisters and brothers, I know some of you are in great emotional and physical and spiritual pain this night. Remember and know always, as you bow before the manger, that baby in the manger knows your pain because He experienced your pain because that pain is a very real part of being human.

Since I was a boy, one of the annual Christmas television treats that brightens up the season is the *Charlie Brown Christmas*. In this special, Charlie Brown directs a Christmas play and hunts for the perfect tree. When the special was first shown, the folks at CBS were concerned that the use of actual quotes from the Bible would turn viewers off. Well imagine that, religion intruding into a Christmas special! But Peanuts creator Charles Schulz was insistent. So Linus Van Pelt recites the Christmas story from the King James Version of the Bible from the Gospel of Luke telling the same story we read tonight. Here was something I always noticed in the show, and I hope you will too, when you watch it again. Linus, who was always holding onto his security blanket and

sucking his thumb, let's go of the blanket when he tells the story of Jesus' birth. Something very special happened in our world and to all of us over two thousand years ago. The angel, that messenger from God, tells us not to be afraid. Sometimes we just need to drop our security blankets and stop afraid so we can be reminded of the meaning of it all.

Opening Scene, Charlie Brown says: I guess you were right, Linus. I shouldn't have picked this little tree. Everything I do turns into a disaster. I guess I really don't know what Christmas is all about.

[Shouting in desperation]

Charlie Brown: Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?

Linus Van Pelt: Sure, Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about.

[Moves toward the center of the stage]

Linus Van Pelt: Lights, please.

[A spotlight shines on Linus]

Linus Van Pelt: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, 'Fear not:'"

[Linus drops his security blanket on purpose]

Linus Van Pelt: "for behold, I bring unto you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a

Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'"

[Luke 2:8-14 KJV]

Linus Van Pelt: [Linus picks up his blanket and walks back towards Charlie Brown] that's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown. AMEN.