

## Keep it Simple

Luke 2:1-20

### Slide: Paper Roll Nativity

One of my earliest memories of Christmas was when, as a Kindergartner in Sunday school, I made a Nativity Scene. It was made out of toilet paper rolls. It turns out you can do a lot of crafts with toilet paper rolls. Just ask our Faith Family Ministry, Sunday school crew or Preschool. My toilet paper roll nativity included Jesus, Mary, Joseph, a Shepherd, an Angel, and last, but not least, a cow. I remember my Mother was so proud to display it underneath the Christmas tree.

And, each year, when Christmas was over, she would gently put it in a box so that it would not get squished. And, each year, as Christmas came around again, she would take it out, years and years of wearing and tearing but still a reminder of when her child was little. By late elementary school, I was pretty much done with that Nativity set I made. At one point, we couldn't even find Jesus anymore. And, well,

without Jesus, that pretty much ended that. Naturally, other, more durable Nativities took its place.

Those early days of my life, Christmas seemed pretty simple. Looking back, I now know that Christmas was anything BUT simple for adults. But, it *felt* simple. I think we call that nostalgia, our very real tendency to pick and choose our fondest memories as having been regular or how it always was, when in reality, there were plenty of problems in the world and things were not always better just because they were long ago.

But then, I would venture a guess that even the story of Christmas, the beloved account from Luke's Gospel that was heard yet again this night, also felt simple to me when I was a child and even was simply told by some of our children at our 3pm service today.

### Slide: Poinsettia

Yet, along the way, just like much of life, we humans get bogged down with the complexities of the Christmas

message because life is anything but simple. Of course, one might argue that's why Jesus needed to come. Nothing about this world is simple when applying human sin and suffering to it.

A war raging between Russia and Ukraine, major active shooting events now commonplace, racism and antisemitism on the rise, inflation, poverty, not to mention the continuing lingering of a Pandemic and what that means. Add to it our own private battles, whether illness, financial troubles, addiction or familial problems, it's easy to look at that toilet paper roll nativity and ask, "What gives, God? What were you doing coming this way as an ordinary baby? I'm not sure I buy it!" Quite frankly, the simplicity of God's Christmas letter to us all wrapped up in a manger I think can get overworked to death.

**Slide: Winterberry**

Pastors, of course, are not at all immune to overworking the Christmas message. In fact, we often tend to apply a lot of

internal pressure to ourselves around Christmas worship and what we are communicating. This is the night that we come to a full church. Expectations are often high. Churches do their best to go that extra mile. We pull out the candles, the choirs prepare very special pieces, the music and the hymns are well thought out. All the services are unique from each other while at the same time having the added expectation of technology due to the last two years having an enormous impact on everything now.

Add to it that as we are coming out of a pandemic with renewed energy here and people are ready to engage in their faith, hopes are high. I have seen it growing with great depth here. Add to this the fact that I'm *the* pastor here at present; it can be pretty easy to put the pressure on to get in this pulpit and say something amazing and complex, to offer theologically astute analysis of the manger, or the shepherds, or the political surroundings of what Mary and Joseph had to face.

### **Slide: Lauren and Euphie**

And, I could do that.  
And, I have done that. But, last week, when joking with my friend Lauren Lierman, (and I got permission from her to talk about her), and who I have been singing with for many years now in a local choir, who also plays in our bell choir - as I mentioned being worried about getting sick with COVID right before Christmas and what to do if I couldn't be here for these services. And, Lauren said with a laughing emoji, because of course we were talking on Messenger:

"I imagine we would still gather, sing some beautiful carols, light some candles, and leave feeling joyful because Jesus came into the world."

### **Slide: Winter Scene**

And, just like that, the pressure was gone, at least for a few minutes. But, the Holy Spirit gave me a gift through my friend reminding me that Christmas will come and that it's not all on me to make sure it does. Sure, the way we do Christmas here is a lot of

organization, work, and prior planning before it comes. I would not want to deny all the work from staff and volunteers that go into this hour with you. However, with or without me or you, the people of God would still gather. We would still sing. We would still celebrate the gift of God incarnate coming into the world. The people of this place would worship.

Because underneath all this, it's actually...simple. The message of Christmas does not require hymnals, powerpoints, sermons, and ushers to bring in Christmas. It comes. And, it came. And, it comes to us still. God came from Heaven, took on human form, just because God wanted to love us. That's it. That's all. We just work really hard to get in the way of how truly simple and easy God's love is for the world.

Ok, so maybe it's a little more than that. But, that's the gist. When God observed all that human beings were and still are in the vast concept of time, how difficult, dangerous, and complex our lives would be, how we get flummoxed

about our identity, our place, and our purpose in life, God decided to show up and hang out with us. God involved God's self with us. And, just so we would get the message loud and clear, God chose the most understandable way to be in relationship with us - to be born, to live, to breathe a breath of fresh air, to laugh with friends, to teach, to pray, and to die.

**Slide: Christmas Tree**

I could go all into the Law and the Prophets, the Lutheran theology of the cross, the virgin birth or our creed to explain it all, but tonight I'm not going to. I just want to keep it simple. Maybe I just need to.

Therefore, today, if you comb the Christmas story for anything, just remember two words the angel says to the shepherds. You don't even have to remember the whole sentence, just the two words:

FOR YOU.

The angel says "For YOU is born this day a savior who is

the Messiah, the Lord." For you. That's it. It's right there. Jesus came for you. Jesus came for me. Jesus came for us and the world. Maybe you need to be reminded of that simple fact that it's right there in those two words. And, if you need to hear it again, you can - in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup, there, too, Jesus is given FOR YOU.

Perhaps it's not simple for God or ever was since God did the heavy lifting all the way to Golgatha. But, that's for God to do. All we need to do is accept the gift. No ifs or buts or ands - just that - God loves you.

Merry Christmas, Amen.