

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 2:1-14

“God Became Man On That First Christmas Night”

Far too often, regarding the Feast of the Nativity –more commonly called Christmas, people get confused about what we're celebrating, why we're celebrating it, and who should be the focal point of our celebration. That's why tonight I would like us to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas. In the message that the angels delivered to the shepherds the night of Jesus' birth, we first learn what Christmas is all about - God had sent His Son to earth – to become human. This was not man's idea, it was God's idea! Christmas was not man's initiative, it was God's initiative. Christmas came about all because of God. Tonight, let's try to think about the reasons why God did what He did at Christmas.

First - Christmas came into being because of God's desire to:

- **Embrace us with His love** - "*Good News of great joy that will be for all the people.*" There are a whole lot of people who could use some good news: those who feel lonely and unloved, isolated and un-forgiven. Did you know that pollsters say that **one out of five Americans say that life is meaningless?** How terribly sad!

People do get lonely. We ALL do from time to time. As a matter of fact, the brilliant Albert Einstein once said, "It's strange to be known so universally and yet be so personally lonely."

But we are not alone; **we can never be alone if we know Jesus Christ!**

Just read John 3:16 and you'll see what I mean. St. Augustine summed this up beautifully in his words: "**He loves each one of us, as if there were only one of us.**"

Maybe you have heard about the young man who sent a love letter to his girlfriend. It read:

"Darling, I'd climb the highest mountain, sail the widest ocean, cross the hottest desert just to see you." P.S. - I'll be over Saturday night if it doesn't rain." We find it funny how fickle he is, but, isn't it sad for that young girl who longs for true love, but instead gets only hollow, empty promises. **God does not offer empty promises.** By sending His Son Jesus, God has fully shown his love for us. "*in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Romans 5:8)

Because of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross, we can, through faith in Him, enter into **a loving relationship with God that is everlasting.** The Apostle Paul reminds us "*that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Romans 8:38-39)

Christmas came into being because of God's desire to:

- **Encourage us with His peace** –remember what the Angels proclaimed? "*Do not be afraid!*"

The shepherds were afraid because they witnessed the amazing "*glory of the Lord.*"

Knowing their sinfulness, the shepherds trembled in the presence of God. Jesus came so that we could no longer live in fear of God's judgment and condemnation, but so that we might have peace in our hearts - knowing that in Him we have His forgiveness. The

Apostle Paul gives us great news in Romans 8:1 "*Therefore there is now no*

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condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Many people today do not believe that salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone. We hear from some that He is only one of many ways to salvation. Let's face it - the world needs a savior - because without one – we are totally lost! Do you believe you are beyond saving? Are you hopeless and without direction? Jesus Christ will save you, just give Him permission! Come to Him today - just as you are – but be ready to be transformed by His love. **God loves you just the way you are – but He loves you too much to leave you that way!** Please listen to these words from Romans 5:1 *“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Thank God that **He loves us enough to send us a Savior – Jesus Christ – His Son!**

Christmas came into being because of God's Desire to:

- **Enrich us with His joy** - *"Great joy"*

In a large stone cathedral in Europe there was a large, magnificent pipe organ. On one Saturday afternoon the sexton was making one final check of the choir and organ loft. He heard footsteps coming up the stone stairway. He thought the doors were all locked, but he turned and saw a man in slightly tattered traveling clothes. "Excuse me, sir," the stranger said, "I have come from quite a distance to see the great organ in this cathedral. Would you mind opening the console so that I might get a closer look at it?" The man also asked if he could sit at the bench, and finally, he asked to play. Each time the sexton said no – but the man was so persistent that the sexton finally gave in.

Overjoyed, the stranger pulled out some stops and began to play. The cathedral was filled with the most beautiful music the sexton had ever heard. When the stranger stopped playing and slid off the organ bench and started to leave. "Wait!" cried the sexton. "That was the most beautiful music I have ever heard in the cathedral. Who are you?" The stranger turned for just a moment as he said, "Mendelssohn." This man was none other than Felix Mendelssohn, one of the greatest organists and composers of the 19th century!

After Mendelssohn left - the sexton was all alone in that great stone cathedral, but the beautiful organ music still ringing in his ears. "Just think," he said softly to himself, "I almost kept the master from playing his music in my cathedral!" Each one of us has the opportunity to have a personal relationship with the Master of the universe - Jesus Christ? Let's not keep Him from "playing His music" and letting Him be Master of our lives! Jesus said in John 10:10 *“I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.”* Remember what the angels spoke of? Not just of "joy," but of **GREAT joy!**

Secondly: **In sending His Son to earth, it was God's design that Jesus Christ would**

- **Fulfill the Scripture** - *"In the town of David..."*

The angels pointed to Christ's birth fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy of Micah 5:2 that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem: *“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.”* Bethlehem – or Bet-Lechem which means “house of bread” and Ephrathah which means fruitful; the “Bread of Life” would be born from

a fruitful town indeed – which bore two kings – David and Jesus.

In the Old Testament **there are at least 116** prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, all of them made hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus and all of them fulfilled to the letter in Jesus Christ, the Messiah. George Heron, a French mathematician, calculated that the odds of one man fulfilling only 40 of those prophecies **are 1 in 10 to the power of 157**. That is a **1 followed by 157 zeros**. Compare it to this; the odds of winning the Georgia lottery are **14 followed by 6 zeros**.

In the Old Testament, the prophecies become clear and flow to this ultimate climax when God said, I reveal myself to some at this level, some at this level, and some at this level - until the prophetic revelation of God comes to its fulfillment in the sending of His only Son, Jesus Christ. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled, and there, Jesus Christ was born.

In sending His Son to earth, it was God's design that Christ would:

- **Provide our Salvation** - "*A Savior has been born*"

If our greatest need had been information, God would have, sent us a teacher. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist or engineer. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us a financial expert. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer. But the world's greatest need is forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior. Jesus died so that we might live. His death on the cross paid the price for all of our sins.

In sending His Son to earth, it was God's design that Christ would:

- **Rule as Sovereign** - "*He is Christ, the Lord*"

The name that is above all names is the name of Jesus and at His name "***every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord***" (Philippians 2:10-11)

Thirdly - Christmas **occurred through God's own Decision**

- **God decided to come as a man** - as "*a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger*"

The creator of the universe could have come as a king in the glory of His palace – but instead He came in a manger, (a feeding trough) where animals eat and sleep. Jesus accepted the dependent limitations of infancy - under the most appalling conditions – with animals in a stable. God lowered Himself to become one of us! He became poor so that WE might become rich! **God came to walk among us - so that He might wrap His arms around us.** Hebrews 4:14-16 tells us "*we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we*

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are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.”

God decided to announce to mankind – *“And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger.”*

The Prophet Jeremiah proclaims these words of the Lord: *“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. And I will be found by you”* (Jeremiah 29:13-14)

Did you know that year after year Israeli postal workers find themselves sorting through huge piles of undeliverable mail? Among these “dead letters” are many that are addressed to God. Some have been forwarded by foreign postal workers who think someone in Israel might know what to do with them. Eventually, all of these petitions to God end up at a recycling plant in central Israel. Our Lord Jesus Christ made it crystal clear as He told us who He is – and why He came: He said *“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6) Unless our communications with God are addressed, "John 14:6," they're sure to have the same fate as those dead letters in Israel.

Jesus is the only way in which we can make a connection with God. That's why He came on that first Christmas night, and that is what Christmas is all about, my friends. In closing, I would like to share with you a message in the form of a poem that the Lord gave to me in 1976, shortly after my father went home to be with the Lord. It is simply called:

That First Christmas Night

Written by the Rev. John E. Commins

1976, revised 2002

***On a night in the desert
The angels did sing,
That born to mankind
Was their Savior, their King***

***A star in the sky
Was a true guiding light
To a stable in Bethlehem
On that first Christmas night.***

***And there, in a manger,
Lay a baby so small
Who the world would soon realize
Is King of us all***

***Joseph and Mary,
They knelt by the child
To the shepherds and others
The Christ Child just smiled***

***And there round His head
Angels sang with delight
For God became man -
On that first Christmas night.***