

**SERMON: "The Gift of Christmas: Incarnation."**

Rev. Geoffrey M. Ross Sat., Dec 24, 2011, 7:00 pm. St. James Presbyterian Church

The description of what happened that night is simple, but the meaning is anything but: that in this meagre, rather mundane birth the Son of God chose to cross the universe, empty Himself of His status with God to become flesh and bone and blood – that God, out of His love for us, was born in human likeness in order to suffer and die for us. (Phil 2:6-8) From the promises of the prophets that spoke of a coming ‘servant’ and ‘child’ who would lead the People of Israel, we are told by Matthew that the child is now expected, and that the child to be born would be God’s Son – who would be called Emmanuel (God with-us): it is left to Luke to record – matter-of-factly – that Mary *“gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”* And, in a few minutes we will hear John affirm that Jesus was *“the Word made flesh”* – God incarnated into our world – *“and lived among us, full of grace and truth.”*

The story of God’s Son entering our world – the story of the Incarnation – is the gift of Christmas; it is what we celebrate tonight: but, to be honest, it isn’t something that should only be celebrated tonight alone. The scriptures we’ve just heard tell us of His promises of salvation, His offer of hope, and of how He fulfilled them in the cry of a baby born in a stable 2000 years ago in Bethlehem: they tell us the story of God’s love, of how – as the child Emmanuel – Jesus showed God’s love for us by being-with us; they tell us what makes Christmas special – that Christmas marks the ushering in of the fulfillment of God’s promises to restore our relationship with Him; but they also remind us of the cost behind the incarnation. This is why Christmas is Good News, but it’s also why we shouldn’t just acknowledge it – the incarnation – one night of the year.

As we have been learning this Advent, the People of Israel had grown weary of waiting for God’s messiah – of waiting for God’s Good News of their salvation to arrive: of waiting for God to fulfill His promises to deliver them from their despair and disappointment. But the Good News of the Gospel – the true meaning of Christmas is – then and today, is that into the darkness and dis-ease of our world, God showed up; it is that God chose to be-with us. The wonder of Christmas is this: the only person in all of history who got to choose His birthday – and the circumstances of His birth – chose to enter into our world when things were at their worst. The joy and hope revealed by the gift of Christmas, of the incarnation, is that – when things seem their darkest, and most difficult – God, through Jesus, showed up: God came to us in the form of a baby to wear our flesh, breathe our air, and walk our sod. But – as our readings also remind us and make clear – the story of God’s coming into our world – of Him becoming one with us to do what only an incarnated God could do, reveals that the shadow of the cross, and Jesus’ death, hangs over the manger.

Friends, Christmas is not the whole story of God’s plan for our salvation – it is not the finish line of our faith: it is the beginning of the end – as the hymn says; “Christ was

born to save” meaning, He was born to die for our sins. This is why, on Christmas Eve as we turn from the manger to the Table we celebrate the incarnation: because of the incarnation the saving work of Christ's death and resurrection that happens on Easter can take place. So, as we prepare to partake in the Eucharist – which means “giving thanks” – let us celebrate the gift of Christmas – the incarnation, the spiritual made physical – and give thanks to God for what Jesus has done for us: that at Christmas God showed up in the form of a baby – to fulfill His plan for you.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts move us to respond to the true gift of Christmas – the incarnation; the birth of Emmanuel, God with us. Amen