

SERMON: "The Gift of Christmas: wonder."

Rev. Geoffrey M. Ross Sunday, Dec 25, 2011, St. James Presbyterian Church

Do you know what the best thing is about Christmas? No, it's not the presents. Nor is it the great food, or the fact that family gets together. It's not even that so many of you showed up this morning. The best thing about Christmas is that it happened at all! And that's the wonder of Christmas: that Christmas happened so it can keep happening year after year in our hearts, in our lives – and the lives of those we love. And that's the radical astonishment of that first Christmas: that through God's amazing grace – through the wonder of God's surprising love – that God became Emmanuel (God with us) in the world. And, since that wonderful night, Christmas has been the celebration that God's promise was fulfilled.

The shepherds in the reading we just heard lived in a world that had all but given up hope – it had been waiting for so long that they begun to question whether God was ever going to fulfill the promise that a Saviour would come to deliver them from oppression and darkness, from violence and poverty. As they waited they waited in a world not so unlike the one we live in today – a world where the siren call of consumerism or the wail of sirens responding to a disaster or some random act of violence has all but drowned out the innocent hope of something better. But it was to the shepherds – to people like us – that the angels came to proclaim that the waiting was over: that everything was about to change, that God was fulfilling His promise to be-with us – that with the birth of a child in Bethlehem God, in the form of a baby had come to rescue them from the mess that the world – and their lives – had become; that a Saviour had been born for them, us, for everyone.

And you know what makes this story so real for me: it's the wonder and excitement of the shepherds who, after the angel was joined with a sky full of angels, still needed to go and see this Good News for themselves! Wonder compels us to believe. Wonder moves us to respond. So, after the angels had left, the shepherds said to one another: Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. They didn't wait. They didn't make excuses. They didn't question. They went – *"with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger."* (Luke 2: 8 – 17) And see it they did! They were the first witnesses to the amazing grace of God's love for us. They were the first to then proclaim what it is we proclaim today: that today – this morning – the waiting is over!

Friends, the wonderful news of Christmas is that a Child is born, a Son is given, a Saviour has come to you and to me. The wonder of Christmas is He came – that God crossed the universe, wrapped Himself in our flesh, and came into this dark and desperate world. But the wonder doesn't stop there. It grows in the realization that the child born in the manger is the result of God's crazy love for you and me: God, out of His love for us gave us His Son so that He might be-with us and offer us our salvation. And that's what we're celebrating today: the wonder of God's love that God would

come to do the one thing that only an incarnate God could do: be born to die for our sakes!

The gift of Christmas is not that God came to be with us, or that Jesus was born – but is that happened at all. But because it happen – because we experienced the proof of God's love for us – the question is; what will we do with this wonderful news?

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts move us to open our hearts to the wonder of Jesus' presence this Christmas morning. Amen.