

Christmas Eve

December 24, 2009

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Christmas Eve is finally here. After all the preparations, the hurry, and the scurry, whether the shopping is done or the stockings are hung, Christmas is here. And it's time for something my son Andrew and I'm sure many other children have had a hard time waiting for - time for presents! Are they waiting under the tree? Maybe more, maybe fewer. Maybe what you want, maybe what you need. Is this what we're waiting for?

What if we didn't get any presents this year? Would it still be Christmas? Of course we'd all say yes, right? After all, our gift-giving and gift-receiving are only signs and symbols of the real meaning of Christmas. But Christmas without presents? We'd probably be less than honest if we didn't admit that we'd be a little bit disappointed to find no presents at all under the tree.

Yes, Christmas means presents, to be sure, but the presence we receive---and the presence we've come to celebrate tonight---is not the plural presents under the tree but is the singular presence: Oh, it is a present all right, a gift from God Himself of Himself! For to us a child was born; for us a Savior was given! This is the best gift of all - the greatest gift we will ever receive. We celebrate "*God with us*" at Christmas. My prayer is that this evening and always we enjoy: **Christmas Presence. Jesus came in a remarkable way. Jesus came to do a remarkable thing.**

Isaiah, a prophet of God, who lived about 700 years before Christ, writes about a remarkable birth to behold. He simply states: "***The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son.***" There will be a miraculous birth unlike any before it and never will there be one like it again. A young untouched maiden will have a son. This will not just be any son, but one called Immanuel, which means "*God with us.*" The Lord made it clear that the sign He will give to His people is this remarkable birth. And about 700 years later it truly was! Remember Mary's reaction when the angel Gabriel told her she was having a son. "***How will this be,***" *Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"* Do you remember the angel's answer? "***The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.***" (Luke 1)

Now do you see why this birth was so remarkable? It isn't just the fact that the Lord miraculously allowed a virgin to be with child. The miracle is all about this Child. The Child born was the Holy One - He was God's own Son conceived by the Holy Spirit - He was God! Jesus, who was always there from eternity, who laid the earth's foundation, was born of a woman. That's why we make it clear that Jesus was begotten, not made. He was not first created, or first come into existence in the womb for He always was, but now this eternal all powerful God also became true man. He was born a baby. He became Immanuel, "*God with us.*" That's Christmas presence - God was born a man. He became truly human like us and lived among us. Jesus came in a remarkable way.

Think about what Jesus actually did. The other night when it was really cold out I knew I needed to go out and do some things, but I thought about how nice it would be to just stay in the warmth and comfort of my home. Do you ever find it hard to get out into the cold, even when you know there are things to do? Now just think how much God loves you & about what Jesus left for you. He left the comfort and peace of heaven. He left the warmth and glory of paradise to come into our cold, dark world where he had to be wrapped in cloths to be kept warm. He left a place where the angels where at his side, and was born and laid into a feed trough where now by his side were animals that probably didn't smell too good. More than that Jesus, true God, left heaven where He ruled all things, to come to a dark place of sin where He would live as a lowly servant.

Yes, Jesus came in a remarkable way so that we can enjoy Christmas presence. But Jesus came to do an even more remarkable thing! Why do we celebrate the birth of this Babe born in Bethlehem? Why was God with us and what did Jesus come for? Because you and I and the rest of the world needed Him and we needed Him badly! We need Jesus because our world has been destroyed by sin and we deserve only God's wrath and punishment because of our sins. Our evil thoughts and lustful hearts, our sinful minds and angry words, our disobedience to our parents and the government, our apathy toward God's commands and His Word, and all our many other sins have earned us death - eternal separation from God's presence.

This is why Jesus came into this dark cold world of sin and why He is called Immanuel, "*God with us.*" What was the remarkable thing Jesus came to do? Paul writes to Timothy: "***Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners***" (I Timothy 1:15). The apostle John writes: "***The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work***" (1 John 3:8). In the book of Hebrews we read: "***Since the children have flesh and blood, he (Jesus) too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death***" (Hebrews 2:14). In short, Jesus came to save us from sin, death, and the devil. Or just as the angel told Joseph "***you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.***" (Matthew 1:21)

That's exactly what Jesus did. Jesus lived the life of perfection that you and I have not and Jesus did it for us. We also know the main reason Jesus became one of us, human flesh and blood. He came to die for us. He came to suffer, real suffering and death and wrath for sin. On the cross Jesus was punished for all our evil thoughts and sinful words and disobedient actions. On the cross Jesus was actually separated from God's presence and then He died. But Jesus did it all in love for us so that we might enjoy Christmas presence. He came back out of His grave to assure us that we have true Christmas peace. God is now with us always because Jesus has made us God's children. We are forgiven and redeemed and heaven is our eternal home. That is the remarkable thing Jesus came to do. Jesus saved us from hell.

Sometimes it can be a bit disappointing when Christmas is finally come and gone. All the preparations and the buying and the hustle and the bustle, but then Christmas comes, the tree, the church, the family, the food, the fun---and too soon it's over! There is always that child who is still looking intently under and around the tree to see if there is still one more present. That's why we have every reason to get down on our knees tonight and always in thanks because for us Christmas isn't just about the presents, but

about God's presence. Because for us and for our salvation Jesus came in a remarkable way and he did a remarkable thing. As Isaiah foretold: "***The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.***" Having God with us is a gift to treasure all year! Enjoy true Christmas presence, dear friends, tonight and forever. Amen.