

Christmas Day 2008 07h00
And the Word was God

Call to Worship: Isaiah 9:2; 6-7

The people walking in darkness
 have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
 a light has dawned.
For to us a child is born,
 to us a son is given,
 and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
 Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and peace
 there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
 and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
 with justice and righteousness
 from that time on and for ever.

Advent Candles

Prayer

- Hymn 92 — Angels from the Realms of Glory

Welcome & Notices

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Lord, on this Christmas Day, this day when we remember your birth into the world we come before you in joy, in worship, in humility

- We recognise the greatness of a god who chooses to give up his power and be born as a helpless babe
- We recognise the wonder of a god who came to reveal his acceptance of even the outcast
- And we recognise the love of a god who set aside all authority to die on the cross for our sake

As we reflect on the birth of one who came as the light of the world, we cannot help but reflect on our own lives as well

- Lives in which we, instead of living humbly, live hungry for power, often hurting others so that we can be glorified
- Lives in which we, instead of accepting those who are different, demonise and exclude them
- And lives in which we, instead of living in love, choose to hate, often crucifying others as we proclaim ourselves king.

Instead of being bearers of light, we, through our words and deeds, so often bring darkness.

- Yet, Lord, we remember today how your light shines in that darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.

This Christmas help us to welcome your light into our lives

And help us to turn once again from our darkness, to that light so that you may be born in us anew as the Christ-Child.

Amen

Intro Taryn

Children's Address — Taryn

- Hymn 94 — Away in a Manger

Offering (Epworth)

Prayer

Scripture:

Luke 2:1-20

John 1:1-14

- Hymn 108 — It came upon a midnight clear

Message

INTRODUCTION

- Christmas morning!
 - Children are going — at last!
 - * It's the day we've been waiting for, at last we get to open our presents
 - Parents are going — I can't believe that it came so quickly!
 - * I can't believe that you forgot to get batteries!
- But Christmas is here, we're ready to celebrate
 - Most of us have probably got a day of activities planned
 - Hopefully we've all got the presents that we wanted to get

- Reminds of the story of the little boy who wanted a new bike for Christmas
 - He asked his mother about it, and she told him that the best idea would be to write to Father Christmas. But the lad, having just played a vital role in the Sunday school nativity play, said he would prefer to write to the baby Jesus. So his mum told him that would be fine.
 - * The boy went to his room and wrote ‘Dear Jesus, I have been a very good boy and would like to have a bike for Christmas.’
 - But he wasn’t very happy when he read it over. So he decided to try again and this time he wrote ‘Dear Jesus, I’m a good boy most of the time and would like a bike for Christmas.’
 - He read it back and wasn’t happy with that one either. He tried a third version. ‘Dear Jesus, I could be a good boy if I tried hard and especially if I had a new bike.’ He read that one too, but he still wasn’t satisfied.
 - So, he decided to go out for a walk while he thought about a better approach. After a short time he passed a house with a small statue of the Virgin Mary in the front garden. He crept in, stuffed the statue under his coat, hurried home and hid it under the bed.
 - * Then he wrote this letter. ‘Dear Jesus, If you want to see your mother again, you’d better send me a new bike.’
- Christmas and presents seem to be synonymous with each other, and it’s funny how so often, Christmas seems to revolve around so many things other than Jesus
 - Even if somehow we bring Jesus into our Christmas celebrations somehow
 - * maybe by kidnapping his mother!
- But it is important for us, at least now, I think, to make time to stop and think about what Christmas really means
 - By coming to church, by saying grace, by reflecting on the Christ story at home
 - * even if during the rest of the year Jesus doesn’t feature so much
- It’s important, life changing even, to take time away from the food and the presents and the organising and just be quite
 - * And ask ourselves what does Christmas really mean?
- What does Christmas really mean in your life
 - Is it more than gifts that you’ve given and received?
 - Is it more than friends and family?
 - Is it more than too much food — and leftovers till new year?
- And perhaps as we gather at church today to sing well known songs, and to hear the familiar story to ask if Christmas is more than that

- To ask if it's more than a story with angels and an inn-keeper and shepherd, and wise-men
 - * that gets told once a year
- I want to suggest this morning that it has to be
 - Because as much as there is a story in Luke and Matthew that we hear every year
 - that almost seems to play out as a fairy tale as it is presented by numerous Sunday schools at the end of the year
- There is another story, a back story, a story that somehow seems secondary to the angels and the shepherds and everybody else,
 - And sometimes, although we know the story, we miss the implications of it
- And that is the version of the story told by John, and that is the basis of our faith as Christians
 - “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”
- See, apart from the angels and Mary and Joseph and everybody else that we focus on there is a truth that we sometimes forget
 - The story isn't about the birth of a child in stable
 - * It is about the birth of God into our world
- See, Jesus wasn't just God's Son
 - Jesus was God
 - Jesus was God
- And if we can take a hold of that it can transform how we see Christmas, and indeed, how we live our lives
 - So this morning this is what I want to explore by moving beyond the fairy tale story of Mary and Joseph
- And moving towards the life-changing truth of
 - God with us
 - And God dying for us

(1) God with Us

- The first life-changing truth that we can take from the fact that God was born as human in the person of Jesus is that God is with Us.
 - Sometimes we struggle with that
 - * Not the statement, but the experience
 - We often ask, “Where is God?”, and sometimes it is difficult to hear the answer, “God is with us”

- Yet when the birth of the Christ child is promised to Joseph by the angel in Matthew's gospel the angel says to him that the birth of Jesus is a fulfilment of the prophecy from Isaiah
 - A prophecy of the one who will be called Immanuel — which means, “God with us”. (Mt 1:23)
 - * God with us.
- You see we have a theology in which we speak of Jesus as being the Son of God, and in which we cannot help but see Jesus as a human baby sent by God, and not God himself
 - In many cases ‘Son of God’ is the best way to describe Jesus
- But at the same time is hopelessly inadequate
 - Because Jesus is not just the son, but Jesus is God himself.
 - The Word was God — not someone sent by God, but God himself
 - * When we begin to grasp this that's when everything that we read and learn about Jesus and the things he did and said begin to make sense and seem possible
- We call him Son because he has come from God, and is born as a human child
 - But we cannot escape the fact that Jesus himself contains the fullness of God
- A difficulty many people have in understanding Christianity is understanding the Trinity
 - Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 - On the one hand people from strongly monotheistic faiths such as Judaism and Islam — who say there is only one God
 - * struggle to understand the place of Jesus
 - And on the other Christians as well struggle with this concept of how everybody fits together
- Let's, for today, as we celebrate Christmas, put aside the idea that Jesus is God's Son
- And say instead that Jesus is God
 - Jesus is Immanuel, God with us
 - Jesus is the physical manifestation, in human history, of a God who is beyond it!
- As soon as we start seeing Jesus is God, our difficulties about the Trinity, about monotheism, fall away.
 - And the story of Jesus takes on a whole new meaning
- Because if Jesus is God — and he is — then
 - it is not impossible for the miracles that we read about in the New Testament to take place

- * It is not impossible for food to be multiplied
 - It is not impossible for the healing that we read about to take place
 - * Blind people can see and the lame can walk
 - It is not impossible for the dead to be raised to life
- Suddenly the stories about Jesus and the things that he did and the things that he said make sense in a new and exciting way
 - And the gospels come life with power and authority in your life and mine
- And if Jesus is God, then it is not impossible for him to make a difference in your life and in mine
 - You see, as long as we see the story of his birth as a type of a fairy tale
 - * As long as we see Jesus as a helpless babe in a manger
- We are free to ignore him
 - The same way we ignore Prince Charming
- But as soon as we start to see Jesus as God we're in trouble because that truth will compel us and assist us to transform our lives in a way that is sometimes quite uncomfortable
 - And if Jesus is God, then that means that it is quite possible for him to die on the cross for us and be resurrected back to life

(2) God dies for Us

- And so secondly, this morning, on Christmas day, even as we like to focus on the birth of Jesus
 - a joyfully celebration of a birthday and gift giving
- We also have to remember that not only is Jesus God, but God
 - Not the man Jesus, but God
 - * God dies for us
- Sometimes at Christmas we like to forget about Christ's death on the cross
 - That's a subject for another, sadder, time
 - * We'll wait until Easter before we think of how he died
- And yet, the Anointed One's birth and death are inextricably linked to each other
 - God being born in the world,
 - And God dying for the sake of the world
 - * A world which God has created, and yet humans have destroyed
- You see, God's birth as a human into a human world was such an utterly impossible and unusual event that it was impossible for people to accept the radical nature of who he was and the message that he brought
 - And so it was easier to put him to death and hope that the problem would go away

- And even today people who are not Christians often have two objections regarding Jesus
 - The first is that of the Trinity as we have just discussed
- The second, which I have often heard is, “How can a loving, father God send his son to die?”
 - That’s not what a God of love is about.
 - If you believe that you’re sick!
- Please hear this: If the Word was God, if Jesus is God, then God didn’t send his Son to die.
 - God himself came to die
 - * God himself died for us!
- It is not the Father sending the son to die, but the father himself dying for us to show us the extent of his love
 - to show us the extent of his acceptance
 - to show us a way of life in which we can experience abundant life
- Dying for somebody else is not the action of someone who cannot wait to smite us!
 - Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians in 2 Cor 5 and says this: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting people’s sins against them.”
- As God offers himself as a sacrifice — and there are many theological explanations as to what his sacrifice achieved
 - but as he offered himself as a sacrifice, as he exposes his own neck in the Garden of Gethsemane.
 - * He sheds a light on the darkness of those in control, of those in power
 - * He shines his light on the evil of the world, and reveals the forces of darkness for who they really are
 - Not powers that have the best interests of their people at heart, looking for peace and justice
 - * But rulers who only want to keep the status quo and hold onto their positions of privilege
 - * Very much as Herod did right in the beginning of the Jesus story
- And it is then, after he has been tortured and crucified, that God is resurrected — see, if Jesus was just a man you could put him to death, but you cannot kill God
 - And the resurrection of God, the resurrection of Jesus proves the opening statement of John’s gospel
 - * The light has shone in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out

CONCLUSION

- The Christmas story that we hear every year
 - And I use the words cautiously because I know that somebody is going to misunderstand me and call me a heretic
- But the “fairy story” of Mary and Joseph and the angels and the shepherds
 - Only becomes real
 - * And only has meaning
 - When we hear it together with the rest of the good news announced by those angels
- The Word was God; Jesus was God, and God loved us so much that he died for us
 - So what meaning does the fairy story have?
- Apparently in December 1903, after many attempts, the Wright brothers were successful in getting their “flying machine” off the ground.
 - Thrilled, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine: “Have flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas.”
 - Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, “How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas.”
 - * He totally missed the big news—man had flown!
- It’s easy to get caught up in the pageantry of Christmas
 - To become caught up in the carols that tell the story of Bethlehem
 - and the mythology surrounding them, the fairy story
 - * And to miss out on the big news
- It is easy to leave the baby Jesus in the manger where he is safe and warm and won’t cause any trouble
 - And it is easy to put Christ to death because he is too difficult to deal with, and carry on as though there is no difference
- But then we shouldn’t complain when we don’t see Jesus among us
 - When we don’t see the power of God at working our lives
- And if we are asking the question, where is God?
 - Maybe we should go back to the manger, and allow God to live
 - God back to the cross and allow God to be resurrected
- God became man and came to live among us and die for us
 - I don’t know where you are in your understanding of Jesus today
 - * I know there are always many people who come to church on Christmas day who don’t come the rest of the year.
- If you are here today out of habit or tradition or to keep the family happy, I want to draw your attention to the shepherds in the Bethlehem story

- Angels came and made an announcement that a king had been born
- And we read this: “When the angels had left them they said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened...’”
 - * They went to see for themselves
- Maybe this year is the year that you need to see for yourself
 - And we have many opportunities in the new year for you to do that (Don’t have to do it here)
 - * Alpha course, Bible studies and so on.
- But take the opportunity to see for yourself if Jesus really is God
 - And my prayer is that for you, as for the shepherds, you would indeed discover that things are just as you have been told
 - * And that indeed you will discover that the Word is God and has made his dwelling among us
- May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen

Prayer of Response and Intercession

- Hymn 97 — Come and join the celebration

Benediction

Doxology