

SUNDAY, December 24, 2023 CHRISTMAS EVE “All Wrapped Up Tonight”

Isaiah 9:2-7 Luke 2:1-20

It's Christmas Evening, one Holy Night shared around the world with those who believe in the wonder of God's Gift to us in Jesus Christ. It is a night filled with anticipation, excitement and hope. It is a time when we know that all preparations are done for there is nothing else to do. This is the night of our dear Saviour's birth! All is wrapped up and completed!

It is the night which we remember God's promised Messiah was born into the world not as people expected with fanfare and parades and celebrations for days. But it occurred quietly in a small town, out behind an inn where there was shelter and warmth- a barn. Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph had travelled to Bethlehem to attend the registrations process under order of the emperor. Even though Mary was soon to give birth they were required to go. The census would determine the population of the Roman Empire and its various nations of people.

But for both Mary and Joseph these last months of pregnancy had been trying. Mary had received the news that she would bear the Son of God through an angel and yet she was not married. The uncertainty of what her family, community and mostly her betrothed would say lead her to be afraid. Yet it was her faith in God who helped her to say “I am the Lord's servant.”

Joseph too was conflicted after Mary told him about the pregnancy. Yet if we read Matthew 1:20-25 from The Message we learn of Joseph's response:

20-23 While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream: “Joseph, son of David, don't hesitate to get married. Mary's pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God's Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus—‘God saves’—because he will save his people from their sins.” This would bring the prophet's embryonic revelation to full term: Watch for this—a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son; They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for “God is with us”).

24-25 Then Joseph woke up. He did exactly what God's angel commanded in the dream: He married Mary. But he did not consummate the marriage until she had the baby. He named the baby Jesus.

So there they are Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus in a barn. Jesus is sleeping in the manger and wrapped up in swaddling cloths so as to make him feel content and sleeping. But who is this baby, Jesus, lying in a manger? A helpless child who must be fed and clothed, cared for and carried, burped and changed. This is Emmanuel—God with us!

This child ... IS GOD! He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (Colossians 1:15) He was raised by Mary and Joseph. He is One with God and is God, clothed in human skin. Although He's laid aside His rights as God to do His Father's will, He is perfectly God in every way.

This child ... IS CREATOR! For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. (Colossians 1:16) And if we pause for a moment at that scene in the barn, each animal was created by Him. The Baby had nothing to fear for the flowers and trees came from His mind. All leaders, people and others exist because of His creative hand.

Meanwhile out in the fields there were shepherds doing their job- tending more of God's creatures and keeping them safe. The sky is filled with stars and the shepherds are relaxing as the animals graze. Yet in an instant there is loud songs and words from angels- They are told of the Baby born in Bethlehem. And they decide to go and see this thing which has happened.

Using the light of stars, they make their way to the stable. They knock and enter to see this family and they are forever changed. They see the little One in the manger and they know that this is the messiah just as the angels told them. They leave the barn and share the good news with all whom they meet. But who is this child?

He is the son of God and is Eternal! He is before all things (Colossians 1:17a). See the softness of His newborn skin, but know that He has always been. Years do not define His life. Before His mother and earthly father, before kingdoms, and before the creation of all the earth, He was! Jesus is God's Son. He also HOLDS THE WORLD TOGETHER! And in Him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:17b)

Yet this baby does not hold anything; He can hardly grip His mother's finger. But He holds it all in His hands with power and cohesion. He is the one who will change history through his teachings and be arrested, tried and crucified for our sakes.

This child commands nothing in the stable but cries as an infant in need of food, human touch and baby care. Yet he becomes the Head of the church and we follow him because of the Spirit which comes. It is the Spirit and the knowledge of Christ that Jesus builds up the church, the community of faith and is in this place in which we gather to sing and pray. WE give thanks and celebrate God's love given to us today all because of the baby wrapped up and sleeping.

Jesus is that baby but he is also the one who is worthy of our time, effort and experience. And it is he who calls us to look into the stable tonight and to remember what He did for us on the cross. We believe that he rose from the dead and then, in turn, will raise all who trust in Him! And it is before Jesus, that every knee will bow, and tongue confess that He is Lord! This is Jesus, the infant born to save us all.

Looking into the manger, all wrapped up and sleeping is the Prince of Peace through whom we pray will bring peace into our world in this time. Our world has not fully known peace and currently we need Christ's Spirit to move among those in leadership to stop wars and cease firing weapons. We need the peace that comes in knowing this infant sleeping in the manger. We need the peace of Christ to give us hope for the world to come.

The thrill of hope occurs when the world will rejoice and sing as one that the Baby in the manger saves us all from sin and shows us what to say and do in our lifetime. The Thrill of hope we have been anticipating all of advent is resting in peace experiencing contentment even when the world is filled with anxiety and stress. This is what lies in that manger—Christ Jesus our Saviour who BRINGS PEACE IN HEAVEN AND EARTH! IT is God's intention that all who believe will be reconciled through him with God. When this occurs we have the opportunity to see Jesus for who he is – God's Son, the saviour, resurrected Lord and friend to all who believe. And when this occurs Jesus will bring an everlasting peace to believing people of all ages and peace will reign.

What is All wrapped up tonight? The beginning of God's promises being fulfilled in the birth of Jesus the holy infant. A baby in swaddling cloths and lying content and sleeping not fully aware of what

he will accomplish in his life on earth. Yet this knowledge will come as he grows and takes on his purpose to bring about change. And he does bring about change-to humanity. He calls us to love others with compassion and joy.

What is All wrapped Up Tonight? The hopes and fears of all the years—are met in that bundle of baby lying in a manger. But the key question to ask is whether you place your hope and fear in him? Do you believe in the One who comes to us and renews our faith? Do you know the Christ/ Messiah of Christmas and his purpose in coming to earth then? Do you feel Christ's Spirit with us now? This is how we know God is with us.. We need just open our hearts and minds to receive.

All wrapped up tonight- remember Jesus who was wrapped up in swaddling cloths was also wrapped up in linen bandages at his death. He grew from the infant to die and rise again and left the cloths which help him captive behind.

As you unwrap your gifts offered in love remember Jesus who laid in a manger, content and ready to face the human world. Remember also that he rose from death for your sake. And this is why we gather to praise God and give thanks for His Son and the Spirit which moves us in this moment. Jesus is born, our Saviour is amongst us. Receive and renew His Spirit in your life! Amen.

PRAYER

God we praise you and thank you for your love for us all. Thank you for your gift to us wrapped up in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. Thank you for Jesus who grew to teach and show us how to live and love others. Bless us O God and take are fears away as our hope is in Christ Jesus to lead us once again.Amen