

## CHRISTMAS EVE 2006 THE JOY OF BELIEF

Luke 2:1-20

Tonight is Christmas Eve  
 Children are getting exciting  
 And parents are getting exhausted.  
 But the three words that strike fear into the hearts of single moms and dads everywhere  
 Are the three words that can crush your spirit.  
 They are "Some assembly required."  
 How many of you have bought toys that needed some assembly required.

Most of you who live in this electronic age,  
 Don't see those words on the gift you buy  
 But I can't tell you in Christmas past how many toys I had to assemble  
 with tools smaller than a sewing needle and  
 With hands steadier than a surgeon.  
 And how often I gritted my teeth and held my tongue as I Put together  
 what some architectural genius conjured up in his closet.  
 I have the scarred knuckles to prove my point.

On Christmas morning my little children would yell  
 Come see what we got for Christmas.  
 And then ask: Daddy, why are your hand bandaged and packed in ice?

Children bring to us the wonder of Christmas don't they.  
 Tonight we revisit the wonder of God with us,  
 The true Christmas gift,  
 And we light a candle for One who is  
 the Light of the World.

No other figure has entered our world and  
 defined and divided human history like Jesus.  
**Time Magazine Cover** a few years ago said:  
 "It would require much exotic calculation to deny that the single most powerful figure –  
 not merely in these two millenniums but in all human history – has been Jesus of  
 Nazareth." (Time, Dec. 6, 1999)

Tonight (This Christmas) one billion people from every continent  
 Will stop and celebrate the birth of one who was called  
 Emanuel, which means "God with us."

But too often for adults somewhere along the way  
 Our celebration becomes just another religious holiday  
 And something is lost in the meaning of this night.

Last week I watched the story of "The Polar Express" by Chris Van Allsburg  
 The story ends with the young boy who refuses to believe Santa does not exist  
 even though his friends have told him quite the opposite.

He is taken by a train called the Polar Express to the North pole.  
 When he is chosen by Santa to receive the First Gift of Christmas,  
 He chooses a shiny silver bell from Santa's sleigh.  
 The tinkling bell is cut from the reindeer' harness and given to the boy.  
 The unique thing about the bell is that  
 its sound can only be heard by those who believe.  
 But he loses the bell on his way back home.

The movie ends on Christmas morning  
 With the Boy now as an adult narrating the story.  
 Telling how as he grows older  
 There is a sense of sadness for him  
 About the loss of hearing the bell.  
 Lets watch the movie clip.

### **HAS THE SAME THING HAPPENED TO THE REAL CHRISTMAS STORY.**

We believed it when we were children,  
 But as we grow older, the skepticism of the world  
 Has eroded the joy and wonder of it.

So let us tonight reconsider the story of Christmas  
 And the unlikely events that have made it difficult to believe.

#### **1. JOSEPH AND MARY AN UNLIKELY COUPLE.**

Could Joseph have imagined what all this meant?  
 Just a carpenter,  
 A carpenter who was probably not very wealthy, AND not very healthy.  
 Since we know that he died only some 14 years later.  
 Perhaps Joseph wondered most about himself... and Mary.  
 Could any two people be more unlikely to have God involved in their lives?

The angels must have been shocked as they took one look at the couple  
 And realized they were no king and queen ...  
 they weren't even religious leaders.  
 Just a Jewish peasant girl who had barely outgrown her acne...  
 But with this poor carpenter and a peasant girl?  
 God was going to have dinner every night with  
 The source of all wisdom is going to call this guy "Dad"?  
 The fate of the world would be resting on the response of two rural teenagers.  
 Reminding us that humble and poor people are considered blessed by God.

#### **1. JOSEPH AND MARY AN UNLIKELY COUPLE.**

**Or have we lost the wonder because of**

#### **2. BETHLEHEM AN UNLIKELY TOWN**

**the last place expected for a king to be born.**

There was Rome, Ephesus, Alexandria.  
 Bethlehem was "nowhere".  
 It still is today.

Most people left this little lost town to go somewhere.  
 It shouldn't surprise us that there was no room at the only Inn in town that night....  
 because when the census demanded everyone return to their hometowns ....  
 All of those who got out of town returned to fill the inns.

Why choose the little town of Bethlehem to herald a savior?  
 Or was God trying to communicate that  
 From this night on we should never think  
 That our city or our person  
 Was too common or little to be used of God.  
 After all this unlikely town was the place where  
 Emmanuel God with us, would be born.

### **BETHLEHEM AN UNLIKELY TOWN**

#### **Or have we lost the wonder because 3. THE STABLE AN UNLIKELY BIRTH PLACE**

Joseph must have wondered.  
 How can God let his son be born in a stable?

We don't get the whole picture from our nativity scenes today  
 When I visited Israel I stood in the cave like structure in Bethlehem  
 where they say Jesus was born.  
 It was dark and dank.  
 The movie "The Nativity" plays out the realism of the cave.  
 Just an insert into the hillside.  
 Little place for protection for animals, much less for human.

The manger where Jesus laid was just an indentation carved out in the rock  
 Or in the more luxurious place one built out of wood.  
 Both covered in animal hair and saliva stained.  
 Here in this unlikely place was born the Prince of Peace.

Kings should be born in a palace like Caesar Augustus  
 He ruled the Roman empire  
 His kingdom and rule as a king of peace was known as Pax Romana.  
 It came with his sword as he put to death 300 of Rome's senators  
 Along with his own family members  
 And he initiated Crucifixion for his political dissenters.

But today Caesar Augustus and King Herod would be forgotten  
 Would it not be for a baby born in a manger.  
 Who kingdom was not of this world.

A KINGDOM that began in an unlikely place.  
 But so common and unusual it would never be forgotten.  
 Reminding of that there is no place to dark,  
 Or to cold, too dirty, or too lonely for God's presence  
 To be near us.

## THE STABLE AN UNLIKELY PLACE

### 4. A BABY AN UNLIKELY KING

Perhaps Joseph wondered what would this baby look like this son of God.

After all he wouldn't see himself in this son.

but could he at least expect to see something of God in this son?

**Isaiah 53:2**

**He grew up before him like a tender shoot,  
and like a root out of dry ground.**

**Dry ground doesn't produce strong plants.**

Dry ground doesn't produce strong physical life.

**"...a tender shoot...out of dry ground."**

**Isaiah goes on to say:**

**He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.**

Nothing noticeable about him.

A guy you could pass in the crowd.

In fact Jesus did often slip away into the crowds.

And Judas had to identify him with more than just a point of the finger.

He would have to kiss on the cheek when they came to arrest him.

God was trying to communicate that he didn't come to impress us ... intimidate us...

but to be one of us...to be one with us.

So there would be no mistake.

His appearance or looks would not confuse or mislead us.

But that he came to SAVE US.

It is to this God Child in human flesh that we bring our sacrifices of praise

Just as the wise men brought their gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Because Jesus is the one and only true God

**Romans 14:11 As surely as I live, says the LORD, every knee will bow before me;  
every tongue will confess to God.**

Think about it this way.

Your house or car payment is a debt you own a bank.

Your debt is paid or reduced when you send your monthly payment to the appropriate address.

But if you send it to another address,

Even by accident, the money will end up in the wrong hands.

In a case like that.

You might believe that your account is paid,

But you'd be wrong.

That is why the angels said

**Jesus will save us from our sins.**

Only through Christ is the atonement made for sins.  
Don't send your sin to the other religious altars of the world.  
Because they will return to you unpaid.

**“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12**

God sent Jesus an unlikely savior  
Born of the virgin so there would be no doubt  
To whom we must turn to find forgiveness from our sin.

**A BABY THE MOST UNLIKELY SAVIOR  
5. IMMANUEAL AN UNLIKELY NAME.**

When Isaiah the prophet of God wrote down these words he was given,  
**Isaiah 7:14**

**“...the Lord ... will give you a sign (of the Messiah who will save you).. The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”**

Joseph must have wondered at his name:  
Jesus .... Simply the Greek form of Yeshua.= Joshua.  
Really as common as any name could be.  
Certainly not fitting for a king.  
Something more like Randall or Charles, Alexander

Today parents choose names to set their children apart.  
Celebrities change their name to be unique, classy.  
Instead of : Sidney Leibowitz--- Steve Lawrence.  
Instead of : Norma Jean Mortenson--- Marilyn Monroe.  
Carlos Ray --- Chuck Norris  
Richard Starkey---- Ringo Starr  
Nicholas Kim Coppola --- Nicolas Cage  
Caryn (Karen) Elaine Johnson ---- Whoopi Goldberg  
William Jefferson Blythe III ---- Bill Clinton

**The Angel said: You shall call him Emanuel: or Jesus  
For he shall save his people from their sins.**

A name so common that it would be easily remember  
In the midst of our greatest crisis,  
In the dept of our deepest darkness and despair  
We can call out Jesus , Jesus

**But I call to God, and the LORD saves me. Psalm 55:16**

A name so common that in calling it we discover  
That God is with us in our midst.  
God is with us.  
Immanuel

**Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."  
Psalms 50:15**

Lance Armstrong, cancer survivor and 7 times Tour de France winner said in a television interview that “often when people are fighting cancer, They like to hear stories of others who have beaten cancer. Why? Because stories of good news and survival offer hope. Such stories communicate that life can go on.”  
The same is true of divorce and grief,

Perhaps that is one of the reasons that the Christmas story is so loved  
In a similar way it communicates to us.  
That there is hope for an ailing human race.

In a world of child molestation, Spousal abuse, and internet porn.  
In a world of broken families and shattered homes.  
Of identity fraud and corporate scandal,  
In a world of suicide bombers and terrorist threats.  
Of cancer, ecoli, sin, and death.  
It is to this world that we tell the good news.  
That God is with us.  
Emanuel—God is with us.

That God could take a little forgotten town,  
A dirty stable.  
A unknown peasant couple  
A unlikely baby  
And send him as KING AND COMMANDDER.

Joseph’s house would never be the same...because God had entered.  
And our house will never be the same,  
Our lives will never be the same --when we when we ask Jesus to enter.  
At his word Sin is forgiven  
Storms will cease,  
Doubts will fly  
Cancer will be healed.  
Lepers will be cleansed.  
Death will be defeated.  
Hope will be restored.  
Because God is with us.

May we never get too old to hear  
The tinkle of the bells and the angels song  
**“Rejoice for unto you is born this day in the city of David  
A Savior which is Christ the Lord.”**

