

Christmas A
December 24/25, 2022
Holy Family, Laurel Springs

“Can anyone tell me what Christmas is all about??” asks Charlie Brown.

“Sure, Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about.”
Lights, please.

Say it with me. You know it by heart.

“And there were in the same country, shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will

toward men.

That's what Christmas is all about Charlie Brown."

This message that Linus gave to a confused Charlie Brown in December 1965, on National Primetime television and every holiday season since, has been the same glorious message for more than two thousand years. The Good News of God becoming flesh, to dwell with us, with here on Earth and to save us from our sins.

A very pregnant young girl and her fiancé travel 90 miles through desert wilderness on foot from Nazareth to Bethlehem because they have been ordered to. The Roman occupier has ordered a census. Utterly insignificant, Mary and Joseph arrive...poor and weary travelers who could find no suitable place to stay. Far from home and their family, Mary gave birth to her first-born son in a small cave and laid their baby in a stone trough used to feed the animals ...so that the infant could stay warm. Two very ordinary people have been given an **extra**ordinary task- to work in partnership with God the Almighty to bring the Savior, the Messiah, Emmanuel, into the world.

It is strangely appropriate that news of this Holy birth comes first to some shepherds. In first century Palestine, shepherds were poor and illiterate - outsiders. They were insignificant outcasts. Again, God chooses the ordinary to do something **extraordinary**- to be the first to share the Good News. But that's how God works. He uses the ordinary, the inconsequential, and the broken, to do his work in this hurting world. He uses us!

Christmas is just as much about giving birth to a firstborn son and wrapping him in bands of cloth and laying him in a manger as it is about the grace of God appearing, bringing salvation to all.

At Christmas, God's grace appears like never before: in the flesh. By coming in the flesh, God is making sure we understand how very close to us the holy presence really is. God not only wants us to see that presence, God invites us to feel it—in the flesh! And so that is precisely where grace appears. By becoming flesh in this world, God sanctifies our flesh, making it possible for us to be agents of God's grace – right here on earth, right now. In other words, eternal life starts now. You don't have to wait to get to heaven to live in God's kingdom.

Ever since God appeared in a flesh like ours, and lived a life like

ours, humanity and divinity have been intimately linked. On this holy night, we do not come to worship in order to ponder exactly how the Incarnation is possible. We come to worship to renew our commitment to living in the world as if it is true.

“A child has been born for us, a son given to us.”

“The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all.”

“This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

None of this means that the world is perfect. If you weren't already convinced, the last several years should have taken care of that. If ever any time in human history was filled with earthly muck and mire, much like the cave where Christ was born, it was this one. So much so, in fact, we rejoice that we are able to worship together tonight, to pass the peace, to break the bread. But those here tonight, can, and are grateful and blessed. A year ago, we could never have imagined the number of lives that would be lost or hearts that would be broken by this epidemic, the conflict in Ukraine, and the soring pandemic of gun violence.

Jesus doesn't guarantee that the world will be perfect, but he does supply the grace that we need in order to live like we ought to live. Because God became flesh and dwelt among us, each and every

one of us, our bodies, our lives, our selves, are conformed to God during the good times and the bad. In the manger baby, God sanctifies all that we experience, even our suffering.

The life that God's grace makes possible for us is a life in which we, as Christians, operate from a place of compassion and love. It is a life in which we recognize the turmoil and the tragedy, the trauma, and the deep grief of the world and simply ask how we can help.

“What do you need? What can I do? Where can I meet you? Stay right there. I'm on the way!”

The world cries out for a response rooted in the grace of God's appearing. Not, “What did you do to deserve this?” More like, “Given these circumstances, where do we go from here? How do we walk forward together?”

That is grace in the flesh, dear friends. That is what the world needs. That is what God offers us in Jesus:

**The grace of gifts given, not gifts earned;
Grace that comes to us in our own image and inspires us to live
the Christian life.**

Jesus is that one special gift you have always wanted, always needed, but never expected. Receive him, tonight, (this morning) and always. Amen.