

Sermon – Feast of the Nativity

Luke 2: 1-20

Over the course of this past year we have experienced the breath and depth of our humanity as the world has confronted the coronavirus. The pandemic has revealed to us the extent of our human frailty and susceptibility to infection. The virus has ravaged communities throughout the world and for us, over 315,000 of our fellow citizens have died and hundreds of thousands more have been debilitated by the virus. We have been reminded that humanity is vulnerable to all sorts of disease.

However, as a people we have risen to the challenge to our society in many and varied ways. Our clinicians, care givers and medical technicians have worked tirelessly to care for the sick. Communities have come together to help to offset the devastating human cost of the pandemic. Despite the well-publicized deniers, most communities have pulled together and adopted safety protocols to try and protect self, family, friends and colleagues.

Human capability and ingenuity has also been on full display as microbiologists and other scientists have devised several vaccines in record time. What usually takes 5 – 10 years to develop has taken less than a year, which is truly amazing. This effort is a testimony to humanities collaborative effort to overcome a significant community threat. Scientists had the research, government had the funds and reach, and people had the willingness to be vaccine trial participants. All coming together for the common good. Humanity at its best.

When humanity comes together like this to overcome societal challenges our God-given abilities are second to none. Together we can overcome all sorts of human challenges from poverty, disease to climate change impacts and societal despair. Salvation, saving us from ourselves, is available to us, if only we are willing. God seeks nothing more from us than reconciliation. In being reconciled to God, we become part of the solution to saving ourselves from ourselves.

We heard in the Old Testament reading the prophet Isaiah eluding to humanities salvation coming through our belief in God, who asks us only to “go through the gates” to prepare the way for others, to build up and to remove obstacles. Salvation comes through the power of God working through humanity.

This night [day] we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity, Christmas, where we recall the incarnation of God, through his son, Jesus the Christ. Jesus was a baby just like us, born of a woman, vulnerable and needy. Mary, the God-bearer, gave birth to Jesus who came to earth for no other reason than to show us the way to salvation, how people like us could grow toward being fully human as God intended and Jesus Christ grew to be.

In ancient times, the prophets laid the groundwork for their communities by teaching them about the coming Messiah, the Son of God. They pointed out the injustices of the world that

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were holding back and corrupting humanity. They encouraged people to turn toward God and to follow the path toward salvation. They heralded the baby Jesus who they predicted would be born with two natures, fully human and fully divine. No one had known this before and as with life there were many sceptics and enemies. This baby terrified many, including kings, so much so that King Herod committed infanticide to rid the community of this threat to his reign.

This newborn baby in all its humanity and divinity, was the epitome of truth, mercy, love and justice. The world would be changed forever. The angels knew it. Mary and Joseph knew it. John the Baptist knew it as well. We were to come to know it. The incarnation of God, in Jesus, was the signal to the world that the end times had begun. Salvation through Jesus Christ was now possible.

Mary and Joseph were not your typical parents. But they probably held out hope that their son would amount to all that had been foretold. Like other parents no doubt, they hoped for a healthy child, one who would find his way in the world, benefit from a solid education, make something of himself and settle down to raise a family.

We know only too well that some children do thrive yet many others suffer neglect, illness, disability or other impacts that hold them back from fulfilling their destinies. Within each human child is the inherent gift from God of potential. It is the world that fails many yet opens opportunity for many as well. All our ability to grow is designed so that we can reach our full humanness. Life is a journey the saying goes, and the goal of life is to reach our full human potential as revealed to us through Jesus Christ.

If Jesus Christ is the fullness of humanity then we are somewhat less than, but enabled to strive toward becoming. Progressive theologian and biblical scholar Walter Wink, summed up the incarnation of God in Jesus this way, which I find interesting – “And this is revelation: God is human. It is the great error of humanity to believe that it is human. We are only fragmentarily human, fleetingly human, brokenly human. We see glimpses of our humanness, we can only dream of what a more human existence and political order would be like, but we have not yet arrived at true humanness. Only God is human, and we are made in God’s image and likeness – which is to say, we are capable of becoming human.” ¹

We are capable, but we are not fully there yet. We see glimpses of possibility but many times they are fleeting. This year I think we have seen the best of humanity but we have also seen the worst of humanity, especially in the political sphere. To see and understand the destiny of the baby Jesus, is to know that our lives should track his. He was the light the world needed to illuminate the way for all of us. We now follow in his light as we seek to make the world a better place for all.

As the angel spoke to the shepherds, out grazing their sheep, the angel spoke to us as well. “Do not be afraid; for see I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born

¹ Wink, Walter *Just Jesus*, p102

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this day in the city of David a savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” Good news of great joy for all the people. It warms the heart doesn’t it?

This Christmas we can take great comfort in these angelic words. We should not be afraid for salvation is at hand. We share in the good news of the great joy of the nativity, not just every year, but every day. God chose to reveal himself to us as a human, relatable, loving, wise and enduring. This night [day] we again share in this good news and give thanks together for this wonderful, miraculous event.

Despite the great sadness and anxiety the world over, great joy is a significant part of our experience of humanity. Jesus = joy and hope. Jesus, this incredible baby grew up to show us how to live in this broken world and also how to thrive. Put all your trust in God, through Jesus, and you won’t be able to help but thrive, maybe not always in the material sense but certainly in the spiritual sense and sense of well-being and peace.

When we overcome our fears of committing to a life lived in Jesus, we start on the road to becoming fully human, just as God intended for us. May this celebration of the Feast of the Nativity, the joy of the good news of the birth of Jesus Christ, resonate with you each and every day.

Just as Mary treasured the message of the angels, and pondered it in her heart, may you also treasure the life of Jesus, and ponder in your own hearts how Jesus is calling you forward to fulfill your human destiny.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas, and all joy and peace as we celebrate this Feast of the Nativity, and as you move to becoming all that God intended for you to be.

Amen.