

WELCOME 25 December 2022 – Christmas Day '22 A

Luke 2:1-7 & Micah 5:2, 4-5

Good morning & Merry Christmas. Can't tell you how glad we are to be together on this glorious morning.

Wonder...amazement, surprise...the response to something so beautiful, so unexplainable, so unexpected it takes over our senses Do you feel that wonder when you hear the Christmas story? Are you blown away by the good news of great joy the angels bring? Are you stunned speechless when you encounter the truth that God wrote his name on the heart of humanity, reaching for you with generous forgiveness & unconditional love?

This awe & wonder isn't something we should outgrow, it's something meant to deepen over time as we encounter, experience, are embraced by & daily respond to the gift & presence of the Christ-child in our lives.

For many people, Christmas has lost its wonder. Maybe that's you. The joy of today is painfully & acutely out of step with the hard edges of life. Maybe this sacred story feels too far removed from a world you're struggling to make sense of; its familiarity has dulled your sense of awe, & given way to a predictability & indifference.

Today...allow the good news of Christ's birth rekindle your awe so that you can experience the wonder of Christ's birth for you. Christmas is the day we wake up to the wondrous reality that God has chosen to show himself in human form in Jesus... God chose to mingle with us in the mixed-up-messiness of this world...in its chaos & calm – in its loneliness & loveliness – in its horror & happiness because God is love & God loves all that he has made & is determined that nothing he made will slip from his eternal embrace...

For that Christ was born:

to save not condemn...

to restore not destroy...

to put all things right...once for all forever..

"He will be the source of our peace."

We'll explore & experience that in all its wonder & life-changing joy this morning...

.Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

We greet your coming, God, with wonder:

You come to be with us; yet you remain far greater than we can imagine.

You are near; yet your wisdom & holiness & glory set you apart from us.

You appear among us; and our hearts race in your presence.

We greet your coming, God, with repentance:

We are more-or-less satisfied with ourselves; but you expose our sin.

We are self-confident; but you reveal our poverty.

We are proud of our understanding; but you unmask our foolish ways.

We greet your coming, God, with joy:

We had no true idea of what you are like;

but you have shown us yourself in Jesus Christ.

We felt our human life was of the worth we create,

but you declare our value is found in your son.

We are aware of the gulf between us and you;

but you have bridged it with love.

Come to us again today...in the name of Jesus the new-born King. Amen.

CHRISTMAS DAY '22 A – EXPERIENCE CHRISTMAS! EXPERIENCE THE WONDER

Daryl Dash is a pastor in the US. He sends me stuff to read & think about from time to time. He's a pretty bright guy & last week he started his occasional email like this: I married an amazing woman. I live in a nice place. Most mornings, I enjoy a coffee with her as we look out the window at the sun coming up. And most of the time it seems routine. "Routine...mundane...humdrum...boring...take it for granted"

Why do even the best blessings become routine? Scientists have explanations. Economists call it "the law of diminishing returns." The more often you enjoy something good...a piece of your favourite dessert...1 is great, 2 good, 3rd piece meh & by the 6th or 7th you may not want it ever again. Enjoyment lessens.

Psychologists call it hedonic adaptation. When we have an experience repeatedly that experience loses its capacity to amaze us. We become accustomed to the experience & begin to take it for granted. We lose sight of its wonder. "R-M-Hd-Boring"

Trevin Wax in his book *The Thrill of Orthodoxy*, "The church faces her biggest challenge not when new errors start to win us but when old truths no longer wow us." When the bedrock truth stops making our hearts soar...when the foundational assurances cease to bring tears to our eyes or a song to our lips...when we just go through the motions because we that's what we do...even the best blessings become "R-M-Hd-Boring" when we set a std/target for our lives other than Jesus & keep him like an old stuffed toy

I reckon for a lot of folks...that's Christmas. Most of us put up the same tree in same place w/ the same decorations & the same lights the same way we did last year. We worship in precisely the same space sitting next to the same people. We sing the same songs & read the same handful of Bible passages. We hear what we already know & we go home & do pretty much what we did last year. Are you "wow-ed" yet? US astronaut James Irwin, the 8th man to walk on the moon & follower of Jesus once told an interviewer, "The most significant achievement of our age is not that a human being stood on the moon, but rather that God in Christ stood as a human being upon this earth." Not just the most significant...

The most gobsmacking awe-inspiring spine-tingling breath-taking event ever...

And while Joseph & Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth & laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. The God of the heavens came here to live among us on earth...the Saviour of humanity came not as some great warrior or prince but wrapped in swaddling cloth — a baby born among farm animals in absolute poverty. Are you amazed yet? Have you sensed the wonder & mystery & glory again or maybe for the first time? How 'bout this?

In many & various ways God spoke to his people of old through the prophets, but now in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, & through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God's own glory & expresses the very character of God... – Heb 1:1-3 God has been from forever trying to re-establish a relationship with us that we destroyed... Today in Jesus that healing lives toward fulfilment... We celebrate what has been in the heart of God since He first spoke the universe into existence... renewed restored relationship

This child born from **this** mother sleeping in **this** manger shows us God--- not remote & unapproachable. He comes to us in person. He came to us as 1 of us. The Infinite an infant. The Word became flesh... Our Flesh. He lived w/ us; ate w/ us; drank w/ us; felt with us; died w/ us — to plant his love **FOR** us so deeply **IN** us that we would love him & live w/ him. Jesus came into this world knowing the cost. He bore in His pure being the marks of evil, so we might be cleansed/healed. He bore in His sinless soul the weight of sin, so we could be forgiven. He bore in His human frame the hurt/pain of injustice, so we would be made righteous & live justly. He died/rose so we could live with him forever... He drew near to us in love for our salvation... He rules over all things so we would have no other master ruler lord. So we would be free from every bondage & slavery... Are you amazed/gobsmacked yet? *If not you might be dead already.*

When the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because you are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, & now you can call God your dear Father. Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, everything he has belongs to you. – Gal 4:4-7

As you read the gospels there is not a hint of one person who was afraid to draw near to Jesus. There was not one person who held back for fear of being rejected. Remember that. Remember that the next time you are stunned by your own failures. Remember that the next time guilt/shame burns holes in your stomach. Remember that the next time you experience a lifeless church or hear a lifeless sermon. Remember it is **WE** who create the distance. It is **JESUS** who builds the bridge. It is **WE** who run away & **JESUS** who brings us back to the Father.

The thief comes only to steal, kill & destroy; I have come that you may have life, & have it to the full. – **Jn 10:10** The wonder of Christmas is this: God comes for us in Jesus so **YOU** might experience the abundant fullness of love & life that God alone offers. **He** will be the source of our peace." *He puts all things right...makes all things new...restores & reconciles & re-establishes your heart as the dwelling place for God himself.*

Today like he has from forever, God reaches out to reclaim/redeem/recreate his universe/you/me according to his plan from long ago. God does it through his Son, Jesus Christ. God comes to us in his Son. God comes to us in the only gift we can't mess up, in the only present we don't have to pay for because Christ's coming doesn't depend on us. Christ's coming depends only on the eternal heartfelt passionate love of God for this world...you...me.

"When God our Saviour revealed his kindness & love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth & new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Because of his grace he declared us righteous & gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life." – Titus 3:4-7

We are children of the heavenly Father...born to live in his presence, delight in his love, bear his image & carry out his loving purposes here now until the day comes again when...our wonder will be realized in full & the great promise is fulfilled:

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, & they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, & there will be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." – Rev 21:2-4

My prayer for you between now & then is that no blessing ever becomes "Routine...mundane...humdrum...boring" & you revel in the wonder of God's saving love for you...Let's pray...

Lord Jesus...Open wide the window of our spirits, & fill us with your light. Open wide the door of our hearts that we might receive you & worship you as true sons & daughters of the Father. Open wide the doors of heaven & flood the world with your grace & mercy again today that all people might experience your salvation and be made new in your presence. We pray Jesus in your Name...Amen