

December 24, 2024

Christmas Eve

Order of Service (bulletin)

<https://www.spiritofhope.ca/news-and-events>

Video (recorded live stream)

<https://www.youtube.com/@spiritofhopeunitedchurch791>

NEW LIGHT; NEW BED

Isaiah 9:2-6

The people walking in darkness are seeing a brilliant light – upon those who dwell in a land of deep shadows **light is shining!** God, you have made the nation greater - you have brought them abundant joy! They celebrate in your presence as with the harvest celebrations, or as warriors celebrate when dividing spoils. For the yoke that burdened them, the weight on their shoulders, the rod of their oppressors -you have shattered it, as you did at the defeat of Midian. For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak that was dragged through blood, is now used as fuel for the fire. For a child is born to us, an heir is given us, upon whose shoulders dominion will rest. This One shall be called Wonderful Counselor, The Strength of God, Eternal Protector, Champion of Peace.



Sun just set at 4:20

- The sanctuary lights are off; we only have these candles and artificial light creeping in from outside and other parts of the church
- Nighttime in ancient Judah was for rest; even on nights lit by moonlight, stayed at home to be safe from unseen dangers in the dark; they would not stay up late and waste wood or lamp oil
- Into that reality, the prophet Isaiah promised the wonder and safety of a new day.

NEW BED

Luke 2:3-7,9-11

All the people were instructed to go back to the towns of their birth to register. And so Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to “the city of David” – Bethlehem, in Judea, because Joseph was of the house and lineage of David. He went to register with Mary, his espoused wife, who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her delivery. She gave birth to her firstborn, a son; she put him in a simple cloth wrapped like a receiving blanket, and laid him in a feeding trough for cattle, because there was no room for them at the inn. ... The angel of God appeared to [shepherds], and the glory of God shone around them; they were very much afraid. The angel said to them, “You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you – news of a great joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in David’s city, a saviour – the Messiah – has been born to you.

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Your bed is wherever you can lay your head and fade into sleep

- comfort is nice and can make it easier to fall asleep, but not necessary if you need to sleep
- everything was new to Jesus the day he was born; Joseph was a carpenter and probably had a cradle waiting for him at their home in Nazareth; but in Bethlehem, there was no baby bed (or adult bed) available; the most comfortable option was a hayfilled, livestock feeding trough (manger).
- Rest is what we do, to be able to live well into tomorrow.
- Embrace tomorrow as a new day; wake up ready to greet new light.

IN THIS WORLD

John 1:1-5,14a

In the beginning there was the Word; the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God. The Word was present to God from the beginning. Through the Word all things came into being, and apart from the Word nothing came into being that has come into being. In the Word was life, and that life was humanity's light – a Light that shines in the darkness, a Light that the darkness has never overtaken. And the Word became flesh and stayed for a while among us.

Luke 2:3-16

All the people were instructed to go back to the towns of their birth to register. And so Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to "the city of David" – Bethlehem, in Judea, because Joseph was of the house and lineage of David. He went to register with Mary, his espoused wife, who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her delivery. **She gave birth to her firstborn**, a son; she put him in a simple cloth wrapped like a receiving blanket, and laid him in a feeding trough for cattle, because there was no room for them at the inn. There were shepherds in the area living in the fields and keeping night watch by turns over their flock. The angel of God appeared to them, and the glory of God shone around them; they were very much afraid. The angel said to them, "You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you – news of a great joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in David's city, a saviour – the Messiah – has been born to you. Let this be a sign to you: you'll find an infant wrapped in a simple cloth, lying in a manger." Suddenly, there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in high heaven! And on earth, peace to those on whom God's favour rests." When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see this event that God has made known to us." They hurried and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.



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The four biblical gospels each have their own way in describing Jesus' birth

- Mark (first written early 70s) -
 - starts with baptism when Jesus was about 30, not Bethlehem,
 - mentions that Jesus has a mother: so he was (presumably) born at some point
 - not the Bible's best Christmas story
- Matthew (mid-70s: knew Mark's gospel)
 - Mary & Joseph married, but no sex
 - Mary gets pregnant; Joseph to divorce quietly
 - Joseph's dreams: child from holy spirit, name *yehoshua* ([Adonai] Saves)
 - Born in Bethlehem;
 - as much as two years later, foreign astrologers (magi) follow a star and bring gifts to the family's house
 - dream... move to Egypt to escape Herod's infanticide plans
 - dream... Herod is dead, but successor might still be dangerous... move to Nazareth.
- Luke (also knew Mark; contemporaneous, (but unknown) to Matthew: mid-70s, but very different christmas narrative; *most familiar version*)
 - Angel Gabriel visits two women to foretell surprising pregnancies
 - Old barren Elizabeth (east of Jerusalem)
 - Young virgin Mary, engaged to Joseph (Nazareth)
 - Mary's child from the holy spirit
 - Mary told to name her child *yehoshua*
 - Roman census forces travel to Bethlehem (Joseph's ancestral town)
 - Jesus born in Bethlehem (no room in the Inn, so laid in a manger - presumably staying in/near a stable)
 - After a month (including ritual visits to temple), return to Nazareth
- John (last to be written: 90s or later, author likely knew of all three other gospels)
 - Didn't tell a Christmas narrative
 - Described Jesus as *divine, eternal pre-existing Word* who is *source of life* and is *light to the people of the world*
 - Closest to a Christmas story: *Word became flesh and stayed for a while among us*
- John also mentions early on that Jesus' mother is Mary – the singular agreed-on fact by all four gospel writers

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I know that Luke makes the best Christmas pageant (maybe adding on Matthew's star-following, gift-bearing wise ones)

- But I really like the simplicity and poetry of John

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- Jesus was/is holy word
- This Word is ancient: involved in creation and life
- Jesus was/is light
- This divine, mysterious creative Word is beyond us ... could say eternally distant
 - But... for a while, this word exists in human form
 - as an adult, moving back and forth between Galilee and Judea
 - teaching, performing signs and wonders, gathering a following

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Christmas is a celebration of the start of a particular intersection of the heavenly and earthly realms as experienced in the life of Jesus

- But it is fair to say that it is the post-christmas years that draw people to Jesus
- Christmas acknowledges a start, but that start would be no more important than anyone's first breath if it wasn't for the years after

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Certainly, that was how the author of Mark felt

- The story gets going as Jesus begins an active life of teaching and healing following his baptism by John of Judea: the baptist

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Sure, taking Luke and Matthew literally, the birth of Jesus had local impacts:

- The shepherds who found the manger
- The wise ones who brought gifts

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But *their* stories only get told because of the impacts a 30 year old made.

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No one left their nets to follow Jesus and become disciples

- Those disciples did not gather in Jerusalem 50 days after a fateful passover and felt a new experience of the Spirit because a toddler was gifted with myrrh, gold and frankincense

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People who never met the Word while it was flesh added themselves to the numbers of the early church, not because angels sang over a field,

- but because, they were fed (in mind and body) and cared for in meaningful community
- they joined a movement of a fresh experience of the divine following a path that Jesus had charted
- It drew them close to their God in a meaningful inclusive way.

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The earthly life of Jesus was finite: *the Word became flesh and stayed for a while among us*

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The same gospel that coined that phrase also included Jesus' promise that (even after the flesh faded), the Spirit would continue to be present for all followers and future followers:

- this *Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom God will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you* (John14:26)

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Christmas has its greatest meaning when we aspire to the ongoing spiritual relationship founded in

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the Way of Jesus

- a way that brought healing into helpless circumstances
- a way that brought invitation and welcome into isolated and outcast lives
- a way that saw children as examples of God's grace
- a way that included women in leadership long before D.E.I. was a thing
- a way that said a full loving of God could be summed up in their ability to have as much compassion for their neighbour as they have for themselves

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Christmas exists beyond the years that Word became flesh...

- when we continue to follow the way of Jesus today.

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Amen!

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#58 Infant Holy, Infant Lowly