



Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

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Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

“Not a Dream, Nor an Escape. It's Reality.” – St. Luke 2

The Nativity of our Lord – December 24, 2017

Pastor Chip Winter

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Gospel appointed for this evening and already read for us from St. Luke, the second chapter.

My dear family in Christ, a most blessed Christmas Eve to you. I love this evening and I cannot remember a time when I didn't. I can think back to days in elementary school, my brother, Chris, and I going home across the alley after worship and waiting for mom – the church musician, and dad – the pastor, to get home so that we could light candles, pour eggnog and open presents.

But even when I was on vicarage, spending my first Christmas alone in San Antonio, Texas, far from the home my parents were making in Santa Barbara, California, I remember the candlelight service. Too, I remember the first Christmas, still single, in the parish I served in Tomball, Texas. I was sitting in the chancel pew, singing Silent Night with a lump in my throat. I missed my family, but I loved this service. I love the message of the nativity, the incarnation of our God and volumes it has to say about God's love for us, God's plan to redeem us, God's impending sacrifice on Calvary's cross focus.

Like many of your I like some of the movies we see around this time of year. Not really the Hallmark Channel, I'm thinking more along the lines of “A Christmas Carol” and “White

Christmas.” Oh, and the music, too. For a number among us, the mention of “Christmas” turns things fuzzy and warm, with the focus going soft around the edges. There are images of cookies baking while outside snow begins to blanket the earth. The twinkle of lights on the tree mingles perfectly with all that becomes comforting and warm.

Now, the Christmas in the Scriptures...is not like that at all! Christmas here and now drowns in nostalgia: Christmas carols, egg nog, candles, happy children and the Hallmark channel.

To be certain, there is nothing like an old-fashioned Christmas – and the Bible would be in perfect agreement with that. There is nothing like an old-fashioned Christmas: really old-fashioned; first century style. That Christmas is not a winter wonderland, covered in a blanket of snow. It’s a shockingly bad world where rulers rage, wickedness flourishes and babies are murdered as a precautionary measure: now, to which age am I referring with rulers raging, wickedness flourishing and babies being murdered as a precautionary measure – first century or twenty-first century? Christmas, real Christmas IS light – but it’s light coming into darkness, deep darkness, our darkness. Darkness then and darkness now.

Christmas is a real story, with us at the center of it. Christmas is the message of God’s reclamation attempt on His wayward, woe-begone, ne’er-do-well children. No enabler, this heavenly Father; His threatened consequences for sin are real. Our brother, Jesus, will learn the fullest extent of how real they are. That’s why He came into this world. And through this Son, born of Mary in Bethlehem, we will be given a chance at redemption. We will be offered an opportunity for forgiveness, simply by putting our trust in this Son of God Who would offer His life as the ransom for us all on the cross.

You can tell something about a person by the company that person keeps, or who that person chooses to visit. When Gandhi came to England, he visited first the Manchester cotton mill

workers, most of whom were unemployed. Many of these workers were suffering a great deal due to the textile boycott that Gandhi led in India at the time; Gandhi had urged his followers not to wear clothes made in England as a protest of English imperialism.

Therefore, among the first people that Gandhi visited in England was not the Prime Minister at number 10 Downing Street, but the unemployed textile workers. Gandhi came to extend his sympathy, to apologize for the harm his movement had caused them and to try to explain to them the basis of his movement and his rationale. This is revealing, regarding who Gandhi was and the work in which he was engaged.

When God became incarnate in the Son, Christ Jesus, it spoke what we truly needed to know about Almighty God. He did not come to those who were high and mighty. He did not come to those who seemingly had it all together and really didn't think they had need of Him. God in Christ Jesus came to the meek and the lowly. He came to those who were perfectly at home praying this psalm **“Awaken your might; come and save us. Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved”** (80:2b-3).

God in Christ Jesus came to those who were oppressed by sin and evil. He came to you and me. He came to undo that sin and evil and to remake the human suffering from it through His passion, His death and His resurrection.

There are, at this time of year, some funny ways people have of expressing the Holy Day. Some will put together a lighting extravaganza on their property. Others will have figures and blow-up characters. There will be programs and pageants and plays, put on by a variety of ages. Why do people do this, some of whom have very little training or ability? **“Because,”** as someone once put it, **“it’s a great story and we just want to be part of it.”**

Yet, it is a great story. It's the greatest story ever told. And it's even greater than you might ordinarily imagine because we are already part of it. It was written and executed especially for you and me!

And speaking of this story, here is how Barbara Brown Taylor fancifully imagined a meeting of the council of heaven prior to the birth of our Savior, Jesus. God the Father has called the meeting together, somewhat after the fashion described in the book of Job. And if you'll recall, Satan was present at those meetings.

The Father breaks the news to the angels and archangels that He has plans to send His Son, Who will enter the world in the form of a human baby, in the form of an infant boy. At first, the company of heaven disagrees passionately, which you'd think might be a somewhat dangerous thing to do, considering Who had made the suggestion! But then they begin to come around.

Okay, there was a high risk, but that was part of what he wanted His creatures to know. He wanted them to know that He was willing to risk everything to get close to them, in hopes of reestablishing love between the creatures and their Creator, once again. It was a daring plan, but once the angels saw that God was dead set on it, they broke into applause. It was not the riotous, uproarious kind of applause but the steady kind that goes on and on, the kind that reveals that what you've just witnessed was, well...something you know you will never see again.

While they were still clapping, the Son of God turned to leave the cabinet chamber, shedding His robe as He went. The angels watched as His midnight blue mantle fell to the floor, so that all the stars on it collapsed in a heap.

Then, a stranger yet thing happened. Where the robes had fallen, the floor of the chamber melted, opening up and revealing a scrubby brown pasture speckled with sheep. And right in the middle of the sheep a bunch of shepherds were sitting around a campfire drinking wine out of a

skin. It was hard to say who was more startled, the shepherds or the angels, but as the shepherds looked up at them, the angels pushed their senior member to the edge of the opening.

Looking down on the human beings, who were at the time trying to hide behind one another, the angel said in as gentle a voice as he could manage, **“Do not be afraid; for you see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”** And away up the hill, from the direction of the town, came the sound of a newborn baby’s cry. (Bread of Angels. Boston; Cowley Publications, 1997).

This, tonight, is a wonderful story. It is your story and my story. Christmas is not an escape for us, but rather the entrance of God in the flesh – to bear our sin and be our savior. It is no fantasy. It is reality; the power of God meeting the evil of the sinful world in order to bring about forgiveness, comfort, peace, strength and abundant joy. A blessed and merry Christmas be yours. Amen.