

CHRISTMAS EVE

Luke 2:8-20

Someone once said that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest love story ever written! Unfortunately, not everyone reads the Scriptures in that way. There are more and more people every day for whom it reads more like a legal contract. Thankfully, Christmas comes around once a year to remind us that God isn't in the business of keeping books and tallying ledgers, nor is God concerned about our status or position in life.

If God were concerned about any of those things, the Christ of God would never have been born into such unpleasant circumstances in a stable, as we have heard in the second chapter of St. Luke's Gospel this evening. For those of us who believe in Jesus the Christ as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, Christmas is the beginning of a classic love story with all the right ingredients: infatuation, pursuit, risk and relationship. But in all relationships of love, there does have to be that first meeting doesn't there? How many of us have asked ourselves questions such as, "what if I had been born to another set of parents? I would never have known the love of the parents I know and love now". No matter how long we live, we will occasionally find ourselves asking those curious "what if" questions.

Another way of looking at Christmas is to view it as a crossing of paths. Christmas is where we find the Christ of God

intersecting with humanity! Christmas is our first best meeting with the God who has desired us to be in a personal relationship with Him from the very beginning when He created Adam and Eve. Actually, if it weren't for Christmas, we might never have known the intensity of the love that God has for us.

Mary and Joseph, far from home because of imperial rule, a peasant mother giving birth in unsanitary conditions, in a place where animals were sheltered. There was no fanfare, no royal delegation. They just laid him in that feeding trough and watched his little face, as they listened for his breathing, just like every new parent does. Considering these circumstances, this could not be anything else but true love!

True love accepts the beloved for who they really are; God chooses to love us precisely because we are subjects of the human condition, not because of a favourable bottom line on a social and moral profit and loss statement. Mary and Joseph had nothing to make them worthy of this honour, except their humanity and their willingness. God had waited ever so patiently for One to be born into our world who was willing to finally embody this love that God has for us, not some of the time, not when it was convenient, but in every waking, breathing minute of every single day. It is the birth of that love into our world that we celebrate tonight!

Who would have ever guessed that this crossing of paths, this intersection of the divine and the human, would take place so long ago in a remote, speck of dust village called Bethlehem of Judea? Who would have guessed that in that time and place, One would be born into our world who would one day fill his life so much with the experience of God, so much with the love of God, that in him thousands upon thousands would be moved to make the incredible claim that they had actually met their

God in person. This is the night when God sent out a love letter of cosmic proportions. This is the night in the little town of Bethlehem when God and humanity were joined as a bride and groom on their wedding day. And as Jesus grew and went out into the world, so our understanding of just how much God loves us also grew.

We find in Jesus that God's love doesn't demand perfection, that forgiveness isn't given away sparingly, but recklessly and indiscriminately, that unconditional really means unconditional, and that God's love is completely and thoroughly inclusive. We find that even the likes of us gathered here tonight, fall within the embrace of that love, and that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We talk a lot about peace, and rightly so. But, that peace does not begin on a battlefield, that peace that passes all human understanding, begins in our individual hearts. This peace begins with the knowledge that God loves and accepts us just that much. It begins with Christmas!

Now having said all this, we know that Christmas is a time of sentiment that, as such, can cause a measure of sorrow to come into focus. The Christmas season can give rise to some painful memories for a good number of people. People often think about the failures they have suffered, and about loved ones they have lost. But, without Christmas, our lives would be positively unbearable!

That baby in the manger is the light of our world, even when our world is in shambles. For in that baby the Divine and the human cross paths. The infant Jesus is our living, breathing sign of the

freely given, immeasurable love that God has had for all of us from the very beginning of creation.

Christmas is the living promise that we are never ever alone. No matter where we are in life, no matter in what condition or situation we find ourselves, no matter how far we might stray away, or how unfaithful we are, God, the supreme lover, will pursue us in love for eternity! It's a love that never stops shining. May God bless each and every one of us along with those whom we love this blessed Christmas night!

AMEN.