

Thursday, December 25, 2025

Christmas Day

John 1.1-14

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“The Why of Christmas”

I have to confess: between the Christmas Eve service and the Christmas Day service, the Christmas Day service is, by far, my favorite. Don’t get me wrong, I really do like the Christmas Eve service, with all its pomp and circumstance, with its pageantry. But, I have to admit that it is all the pomp and circumstance and all the pageantry that actually inhibit, or at least limit, my ability to fully enter into the Christmas Spirit. I have to be more concerned with all the logistics, coordination, that such performative liturgy requires, so that what unfolds provides a meaningful and hopefully moving experience for those attending the service. I don’t say this by way of complaint or criticism. It comes with the collar. I am fulfilling my role as priest of the community, leading my flock through the worship experience they long for, that they need, as part of their Christmas celebration. Which, in and of itself gives me great joy.

It is not until the next morning—today, Christmas Day—when I am able to more fully enter into the Christmas experience myself. When the worship is simpler, more intimate. With less to worry about, allowing myself to be more fully present to the meaning of the day and the season. The simplicity and intimacy of Christmas Day that seems to be more akin to what really happened in Bethlehem. The simple setting of a manger. The intimacy of Joseph tending to Mary as she gives birth to her son, to God’s Son. It is only when the angels announce the birth to the shepherds in the nearby fields that things change. They rush to the manger to witness the newborn Messiah. Undoubtedly creating all sorts of disruption and chaos in the process. If this had occurred in a modern-day hospital, the nurse on duty would have undoubtedly shooed everyone out of the room so Mary could get some rest and enjoy some quiet time with her newborn son. Christmas Day is the liturgical equivalent of shooing away the shepherds and all the onlookers, providing an opportunity for us to have a few quiet moments to rest in the presence of the Holy, to enjoy some quiet time with the newborn Jesus.

But even more than that, our Christmas Eve service is somehow incomplete without what we do Christmas Day. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, particularly in terms of the themes and Gospel accounts, are part of a greater whole that tells the full story of Christmas. Not unlike Holy Week, when each of the services of the Triduum are really part of a greater whole.

I’m sure most of you remember being taught in school the six journalistic questions including five Ws and one H: who, what, when, where, why, and how. If you look at the quintessential Christmas story, the birth narrative from Luke’s Gospel which is the designated reading for Christmas Eve, you will find that it is not really complete journalistically speaking. It addresses four of the Ws, as well as the H.

Who: Jesus, Mary, Joseph, angels, and shepherds.

What: the birth of Jesus.

When: during the census decreed by Emperor Augustus, while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

Where: Bethlehem. More specifically, in a manger.

How: “the time came for [Mary] to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger.”

But when it comes to the “why,” there is not much information. Why Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem, already covered in when and where. Certainly not much about why this was an important event or why we make such a big deal about it. Well, there is the announcement by the angel: “to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” There is that, I suppose. But that is a bit incomplete in terms of the bigger picture. Of why God developed this Incarnation plan in the first place. Not to mention that God is only referenced in passing: that the angels praised God, saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”

But there is so much more to the “why” of Christmas. Why this newborn child—sure, the Messiah, but what does that even really mean—why this child is so important. Perhaps the biggest “why” being that this child is as the Son of God. That isn’t even mentioned in Luke’s birth narrative.

To more fully appreciate and understand who this child is, we need the backstory that is the Gospel for today: the Prologue of John’s Gospel.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people . . .

[T]o all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

This Prologue presenting the highlights of salvation history, from before Creation to the time of Jesus’ birth. How the Word, the One who in our Trinitarian understanding of God is the Son, was with God from before time and before Creation. How the Word, the Son, was instrumental in Creation. That from the beginning the Word, the Son, was destined to play a critical role when it came to relationship between God and Creation—particularly those made in the image and likeness of God, humankind. The Word, the Son, represented as both life and light. The source of life—of our life—and the source of light, of goodness and righteousness that God desires for us. The life and light that we share, by virtue of being made in the image and

likeness of God. But also recognizing that darkness has entered the world, corrupting relationship between God and humanity.

This corruption of relationship evidenced in a myriad of ways throughout the Old Testament. A series of attempts by God to create a covenant with humanity to maintain right relationship. Covenants repeatedly broken. Covenants reestablished through God's grace and forgiveness, only to be broken again. Necessitating some means of ultimately overcoming darkness and rekindling the light that burns within God's beloved creatures. To allow for renewal of right relationship between God and his beloveds. Those to whom "he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God."

Borne out of that profound love God has for us, his beloved children, was God's plan to renew right relationship once and for all. The only way that God could establish lasting and meaningful relationship: by becoming one of us. Emmanuel, God with us. The Incarnation. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." That is the ultimate "why" of Christmas. That is the backstory, the ultimate "why" of the events we witnessed in the Gospel account of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, that we recalled with great joy through the pomp and circumstance, through the pageantry, of our Christmas Eve service.

Perhaps trying to cover it all, the who, what, when, where, why, and how all in one service is a bit much to ask. Perhaps we need to break it down into more manageable pieces. Look at the glorious event as reported in Luke's Gospel. Take some time to cherish the joy and wonder of the birth of Jesus, "who is the Messiah, the Lord." And then, after a night's rest, after a few moments to process what we have witnessed, to be able to step back and look at the weightier matter of "why." Of what this all means for us as those to whom the Incarnate Word "gave power to become children of God." To reflect on the profound love that is embodied in the Incarnation, that is embodied in the baby born in Bethlehem. To be able to step back, in a quieter, simpler, more intimate setting, to consider just what it means—what it truly means—that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us."

May this day and this holy season provide you with opportunities to see "his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

Merry Christmas