

Sermon for Christmas Eve - God IS With Us!

Based on Matthew 1: 18-25

There was once a man who did not believe in God. He did not hesitate to let others know how he felt about religion and religious holidays like Christmas. His wife, however, did believe, and she raised their children to have faith in God and Jesus, despite his disparaging comments.

One snowy Christmas Eve, his wife was taking their children to a Christmas Eve service in the farm community in which they lived. She asked him to come, but he refused. "That story is nonsense!" he said. "Even if there WAS a God, why would He lower Himself to come to Earth as a man? That's ridiculous!" So she and the children left, and he stayed home.

A while later, the winds grew stronger and the snow turned into a blizzard. As the man looked out the window, all he saw was a blinding snowstorm. He sat down to relax before the fire for the evening. Then he heard a loud thump. Something had hit the window. Then he heard another thump. He looked out, but could not see more than a few feet. When the snow let up a little, he ventured outside to see what could have been beating on his window. In the field near his house, he saw a flock of wild geese. Apparently, they had been flying south for the winter when they were caught in the snowstorm and could not go on. They were lost and stranded on his farm, with no food or shelter. They just flapped their wings and flew around the field in low circles, blindly and aimlessly. A couple of them had flown into his window, it seemed.

The man felt sorry for the geese and wanted to help them. The barn would be a great place for them to stay, he thought. It's warm and safe; surely they could spend the night and wait out the storm. So he walked over to the barn and opened the doors wide, then watched and waited, hoping they would notice the open barn and go inside. But the geese just fluttered around aimlessly and didn't seem to notice the barn or realize what it could mean for them.

The man tried to get their attention, but that just seemed to scare them and they moved further away. He went into the house and came with some bread, broke it up, and made a breadcrumbs trail leading to the barn. They still didn't catch on.

Now he was getting frustrated. He got behind them and tried to shoo them toward the barn, but they only got more scared and scattered in every direction except toward the barn. Nothing he did could get them to go into the barn where they would be warm and safe.

"Why don't they follow me?" he exclaimed! "Can't they see this is the only place where they can survive the storm?" He thought for a moment and realized that they just would not follow a human. "If only I were a goose, then I could save them," he said aloud.

Then he had an idea. He went into barn, got one of his own geese, and carried it in his arms as he circled around behind the flock of wild geese. He then released it. His goose flew through the flock and straight into the barn-and one by one the other geese followed it to safety.

He stood silently for a moment as the words he had spoken a few minutes earlier replayed in his mind: "If only I were a goose, then I could save them!" Then he thought about what he had said to his wife earlier. "Why would God want to be like us? That's

ridiculous!"

Suddenly it all made sense. That is what God had done. We were like the geese-blind, lost, perishing. God had His Son become like us so He could show us the way and save us. That was the meaning of Christmas, he realized. As the winds and blinding snow died down, his soul became quiet and pondered this wonderful thought. Suddenly he understood what Christmas was all about, why Christ had come. Years of doubt and disbelief vanished like the passing storm. He fell to his knees in the snow, and prayed his first prayer: "Thank You, God, for coming in human form to get me out of the storm!"

God IS with us – that is what we celebrate at Christmas. We celebrate this amazing and incredible wonder – that the Word WAS made flesh, and that the Word DID dwell among us, and that the Word DID come to redeem us and to save us.

Even when we feel like wild geese in a bad snowstorm, when we are blinded by blizzards of trouble, buffeted by blows to our self-esteem and self-worth, and frozen by the fear that can surround us in this sometimes cold world, we can remember that God did indeed send us a Guide, someone who looked like us, Someone who lived and breathed and laughed and cried, Someone who was born like us, Someone who would die, as we all do, but in a horrible, tortured, unjust way. Throughout Advent we have been talking about how the coming of this Child would be a fulfillment of great promise, and that the fulfillment of that great promise also had a price attached to it, because Jesus' birth upset the order of the world. Jesus' birth, and His life, death, and resurrection, STILL upsets the order of the world today. Following Jesus means that we are lead in ways that are NOT the ways of the world, ways where we are called to feed the hungry, give water to those who thirst, welcome strangers, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit those in prison.

Challenging the ways of the world calls for change, and change is not easy. But as we celebrate the birth of this Child, who grew up to become our Redeemer, may we pray to be changed, to no longer **be conformed to this world, but instead to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we may discern what IS the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.** Then we too may follow in Jesus' footsteps, and goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives, so that we may dwell in the house of the Lord forever. May we be used to help guide others into the protection and love that God offers the entire world, until His Son comes again. Even so, come soon, Lord Jesus.

Titus 2: 11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for Himself a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds.

Matthew 1: 18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the Child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall name Him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a Son; and he named Him Jesus.