

Bringing Christ Into Christmas

by Carter Conlon

This sermon delves into the profound story of the first Christmas as narrated in Luke chapter 2, highlighting the unexpected circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus and the incredible grace and love displayed through this humble beginning. It emphasizes how a little bit of God's presence and love can bring transformation and joy, regardless of our feelings of failure or insignificance. The message encourages embracing the reality of Christ dwelling within us, even in our weaknesses and struggles, as a source of hope and glory.

Scripture: Luke 2:1, Zechariah 4:10, Colossians 1:27, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 3:20, Romans 8:10, Psalm 139:14, 1 Corinthians 1:27, Philipians 4:13

Topics: "The Humble Birth of Christ", "Transformation through God's Presence"

Description

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Transcript

We're going to do things just a little bit differently tonight. I'm going to open to Luke chapter 2 and you're going to see the words on the screen in front of you. For those who are at home, those who have Bibles, I would encourage you to open your Bible and maybe join with me in reading a familiar story, a great story.

The story of the beginnings of God's redemption, the story that transformed my life, the story that changed many young lives that are here, older lives tonight, and those that are listening online. Your life may have been changed or maybe your life will be changed by the story that you're about to hear because it's a story of incredible grace, incredible love. It's a story that will be read over and over again at numerous family gatherings all over the world.

It'll be read in different languages. It's amazing. It's a story that never grows old.

It'll be played out in children's plays in churches all over the country. We never fail to be moved by the story. We never fail to shed a tear.

As humorous as it might be portrayed even by some of our children, there's still a message in it that is absolute truth and it can set the soul free. Now before I read it, it's in Luke chapter 2, and before I read this story, I want to set the stage for the very first Christmas that we talk. We're here, we're in the season where we're going to be celebrating Christmas.

More than 2,000 years later and the first Christmas, you know, we sing a song, a silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright. Well, the first Christmas was not silent. It was not calm and it was not bright.

The people of God of that time had been conquered by a foreign and a godless nation. They would have felt like such failures. Anybody tonight ever felt like that? Just you know who God is, you know how big God should be, but you feel like such a failure inside.

And the people of God would have felt that way in this season because they were supposed to be the children of Abraham and through them there was supposed to be something of God as Pastor Ross shared tonight. They were supposed to overshadow them and make them more than they could naturally be and bring the name of God to reputation in the earth. But then here they are as the people of God, captivated now by a godless society.

The godless society around them is dictating all the rules. For example, there's a decree going out from Caesar that all the world is supposed to be counted, that there's no consideration of hardship that it might bring to people who are going to lose their income while they have to travel to their home cities. There's no provision given for inconvenience.

For example, Mary is due to have a child any day and yet still has to get on her conveyance, whatever sort they used, and head to her husband's town to be registered with Joseph. So there was no real consideration. It was very dominant, very sneering, seemingly considering itself superior culture.

It was a fearful time because the people were only two years away from all the children in Bethlehem being put to death, two years of age and under, and so it was a lawless time. It was a time when adults didn't seem to have a problem with killing children. So it was not a quiet time.

It was not a silent time. It was not a bright time in history. At the end, when Mary and Joseph come to the end, the society itself, God's own people, had become so selfish that they didn't even have a room to help a young couple and a young mother who was about to give birth to a child.

You would think, as the people of God through whom the whole earth is supposed to be blessed, that at least somebody would be willing to give up their comforts for the sake of a young mother that's about to have a baby, but selfishness had so set in. They had so lost their way as the people of God that they forgot who they were supposed to be. And just when you think it couldn't get worse, you could be a shepherd.

Now, a shepherd was considered the lowest, if you read the historical accounts, the lowest person on the socioeconomic scale in that society. When you just didn't think it could get any worse, you could be a shepherd. You had to work the night shift on top of everything else.

You made very little money, and most people who were shepherds did so because they couldn't get any other kind of employment at the time. So to be a shepherd, you'd be probably in the worst of the worst place. So this is the scene into which God chose to come to this world.

You know, you and I would not think of it that way. If we were God, we would want something a little more, like a few more horns, a couple of angels, you know, something a little more than what he chose to do. He came to earth encased in the weakest among us, a baby, a God, all-powerful, all-knowledgeable, omniscient God, who always was and always will be, who created all things by the word of his mouth, comes to the world in the weakest human form.

He can't walk. He can't change himself. He can't feed himself.

He has to be taught to talk. This is God. This is God coming to the world.

And so here we begin to read our story. Luke chapter 2. And it came to pass in those days, you know, the days I just described to you, that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. He just got it in his head to count the people, wanted to know where they were.

The original King James says that it was for the purposes of, at least it implies, it was the purpose of taxation. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

You can only imagine the murmuring, the complaining, the everybody is vilifying the Romans, the inconvenience, the struggling, the trial, the jockeying, in a sense, to get the best rooms in whatever towns they had to go to. This is what was happening at this time. It was everything but a silent night.

It was everything but quiet. There was noise. There was traveling.

There was murmuring. And Joseph also went up from Galilee out of a city of Nazareth into Judea to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem. Because he was of the house and lineage of David, and there's another reason too, because it was prophesied in the Old Testament that out of Bethlehem was going to come the delivering hand of God.

To be registered with Mary, his betrothed's wife, who was with child. And so it was that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in the manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

It was cold. It was late at night. It wasn't sanitary.

It wasn't healthy. It was dangerous. And seemingly nobody cared.

And now they were in the same country, shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. And they were greatly afraid.

Pastor Teresa preached a message one time called, Jesus Came to the Night Shift. I'll never forget that title. That's who he chose to appear to.

That's who he sent the angels to, to the night shift, the shepherds. Could have sent them anywhere, to anybody. Could have been a palace, a castle.

Could have been where soldiers were. Could have been where the religious were gathered. But it just happened to be shepherds.

It happened to be people who were considered possibly the lowest. And behold, the angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which will be to all people.

So this is the message. This is the scene that we're coming into. In the midst of all this calamity, fear, darkness, oppression, comes the Son of God, and the angel says, It's good news, which should bring great joy to all people.

For there's born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you. You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men. I have a mind that works this way, but I like to think of it as all these angelic beings are kind of leaning on that canopy that separates heaven from the earth. And I guess so many of them are piling in to listen to this announcement that they broke through the canopy.

And suddenly, they appear in the heavens, and they can't do anything else but sing. They can't do anything else but give glory to God. They can't do anything else but declare Him to be the highest, even though He's come down in the form of the lowest.

They can't do anything else but begin to sing about what they know to be in the heart of God, that the appearance of this child is God's goodwill towards all men on the earth, a song, a happening that should bring gladness into every heart. And so it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Now let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. And they came with haste, and they found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger.

Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. Whatever happened to these shepherds? Something so exploded inside of their hearts that they left this scene. It's just a young couple, and they're in a stable, really, in a barn.

And they have a baby that's lying in the feeding trough for the cattle, as it is, wrapped in regular common cloth to stay warm, because it would have been a cold night. Whatever it was that they had seen, it caused their hearts to so burst with praise that they walked out of that place, or perhaps ran out of that place, and began to tell everybody who had listened what they had seen. So what did they see? I want to suggest to you they had only seen a little bit of God.

I want you to think about this for a moment. God, God, who would have His eternity. God, who is omnipresent.

We teach that here at this Bible school. He's everywhere. You can't go anywhere that God is not.

That's why, of course, no society can kick God out of their society, because you can't throw somebody out of anywhere that is everywhere. You just simply can't do it. And so here is almighty God, omniscient God, all-powerful God, God who created the universe, all the worlds that exist.

We're just starting to see some of them with these new telescopes that we're seeing in the news, that we're discovering distant galaxies. Didn't He say in my father's house are many mansions? It was way beyond what we could even understand. But this all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise, just everything exists because of Him.

God comes to the earth and encapsulates Himself in about maybe six pounds of humanity. Oh, come on now. Oh, come on now.

But I want to make a point, I think, with all of this. And the point is simply this. A little bit of God is bigger than 100,000 of you.

They just saw a little bit of God. So here we are. We're in the year 2022, and we all got to go home.

And we're wondering, oh, God, I just feel so dismal. I feel conquered. I feel I've still got fears in my life.

I don't know what tomorrow is going to bring. And I feel like the lowest of the low. Everybody else has got all these marvelous gifts, and I can barely tie my shoes.

All I have is a little bit of God. But I want to suggest to you that a little bit of God can cause people to sing. A little bit of God is way more than 100,000 of you.

A little bit of God's love, a little bit of patience, a little bit of faith, a little bit of a mustard seed of faith, a little bit of a song that's in your heart, and a little bit of change in your life. You know, sometimes we get caught, and we think that before we can testify at the family table, we've got to be this magnanimous Christian. We have to have testimonies of moving mountains.

We have to be perfected in every area of our life, forgetting that a little bit of God is way bigger than 1,000 of you. A little bit of chiseling away at the old character, a little bit of the new being born. It doesn't happen overnight, guys and girls.

It doesn't happen overnight, but it happens. Little by little, line by line, as we behold Him, we are changed by the Spirit of God into the same image from glory to glory. That means from day to day to day to day, we start changing into what God designed us to be, and we end up being the people that do bring glory to the name of God on the earth.

But don't get caught up in thinking that it's all about you or me, because it's not. It's about the presence of God's Holy Spirit within each of our lives. Whether you know it or not, there's light in your eye.

There's a new sound in your voice. There's more of a confidence in yourself. Yeah, we have a tendency to be aware, and everybody in this scene in Luke chapter 2, they are aware of the Romans.

They're aware of the cold. They're aware of the inhumanity. They're aware of all the things that are going on that are bad.

They're aware that they're not the people they're supposed to be. They're supposed to be bringing glory to God in the earth, and they're just eking out a survival. But yet, it's in this environment that God comes and

chooses to be who He is, and the plan of redemption is born.

The plan of redemption starts small, but then it starts to grow, and it moves, and it goes through 33 years. Then it goes through a cross. Then it defeats the powers of hell.

When He rises, He takes our captivity captive and promises that to give us the things that we need to be the people that He's called us to be. Oh, thank God. Thank God it doesn't have to be.

We don't have to be omniscient. We don't have to have all power and all knowledge, and we don't have to have it all together. We just need a little bit of God.

Let's just recognize that the same God that came and indwelt this, I'm guessing six pounds, okay? I'm just guessing at that. It could have been six pounds, five ounces, so don't rebuke me, okay? So, I mean, I don't know, but average baby's probably around that. But it was that beginning that changed the world.

It was that beginning that set the stage to redeem hundreds and thousands of millions of people throughout time until Christ returns. It was that beginning. So don't despise the day of small beginnings, really, is the point.

You know, you might go home, and you might feel like you're just amounting to nothing, and you're just so aware of all your failings and frailties, but then somebody at the table looks at you, and they see a little bit of God, and it causes them to sing, changes the way they think, and they leave the family. You feel like a total failure. You feel like you're stuck in a manger.

You feel like, wow, this is not the way it's supposed to be. It's supposed to be more grand than this, and here I am stuck in a manger, and yet they leave, and you don't even know. There's a song, and they're starting to tell people about you.

They're starting to tell people about, I saw such a change in my daughter, my son, my brother, my father, my cousin, whatever the situation is. And you and I don't necessarily know that we're changing the way we are. Our conversation is changing.

The way we think is changing. The way we speak is starting to change. The way we reach out and touch people is changing.

We don't realize it because the growth seems to be so slow sometimes when you start small, but other people look, and they see it. That's why the Bible says be ready now when people ask you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Be ready because your message is going to be the same as the angels.

What I have to tell you is good news of great joy to all people. A Savior came. He was born among the lowly, and he allowed himself as the most magnificent being there ever will be, allowed himself to be contained in a baby to prove to us that he is not offended with our smallness.

He's not offended with our weakness. He's not offended with our struggles. He is willing to be God to us.

He's willing to be God in us. Paul the Apostle said, it's Christ in you that's the hope of glory. Not knowledge about Christ, Christ in you.

We have to have knowledge, of course, but it's the reality that he indwells our weakness. And that baby was wrapped in rags. Swaddling cloths were just pieces of discarded cloth that were used to wrap a child

in especially poor circumstances like this.

And when I think that this magnificent God wrapped himself in me, hallelujah. Come alive. Come alive in this place.

God wrapped himself in you because that's who the Holy Spirit is. He is indwelling your human body as you have received Christ. And that means God has wrapped himself in the rags of your life.

The rags of your failure, the rags of your struggle, the rags of your weakness, because he's not ashamed of you. If that doesn't cause you to shout, nothing will. If that doesn't cause you to sing, nothing will ever cause you to sing.

Glory to God. This is great news, good news, great joy to all people. Not just the strong, not just the educated, all people.

Everyone, everywhere, every walk of life, even the shepherds. Because Jesus came to the night shift. Thank God he did.

So Father, tonight, thank you for making it plain. Thank you for making it simple, God. Thank you for helping us to understand the greatness of this redemption.

Thank you for helping us to understand your heart towards us, God. We don't deserve you. We didn't earn you.

We can't present anything to you that should cause you to come to us. Your people at the time you chose to appear were abject failures in the world. They had failed.

They failed to be the people they were called to be. But yet you appeared in the midst of that failure. God, thank you that you don't wait till we have it all together.

Thank you, Lord, that you don't wait until we're strong. You don't wait until we've cleaned up our act. You come to us in our mess.

And you come to us in our nothingness and our littleness, God. And you invite us into this song of heaven. You invite us, oh God, to view something of your heart.

And God, I want to thank you personally that you're making it so simple now. Because you're about to save a multitude in this generation, God. Lord, we love you.

We love you. And this Christmas, just one more time in our hearts, we just joined the shepherds. And we come running to the stable.

And we run in. And we were just overwhelmed that God would come to us this way. God, who holds the world, we could pick him up in our hands.

But he holds the world in his. To the natural mind, it doesn't even make sense. But our hearts are beginning to understand it.

This incredible, this incredible grace.

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