

The Real Christmas Story

by Carter Conlon

God came to us in the weakest of human form, not as a powerful or majestic being, and invites us to come to him, just as he came to us.

Duration: 32:01

Scripture: Luke 2:8

Topics: "Gods Love", "Salvation Grace"

Description

This sermon focuses on the profound message of the birth of Jesus Christ, emphasizing God's love and willingness to come to us in our weakness and mess. It highlights the significance of accepting Jesus as our Savior, experiencing a new life, and being transformed by God's love and grace.

Transcript

Father, I just want to thank you for gathering us here again this morning to celebrate the greatest event in all of history. I ask you, Father, in these just few moments, Lord, that you would cause a story that many of us think we fully understand to come alive in a brand new way, to touch our hearts, Lord, in a way it never has before. I pray, Lord Jesus Christ, that you would reach down this day, Lord, into the deepest struggles that might be found in this assembly or those listening online or in North Jersey.

God, thank you for your mercy. Thank you, Lord, that we have a song to sing because you gave it to us. You pulled us out of the miry clay and you set our feet upon a rock and planted a new song within each of our hearts that we can bring back to you with thanksgiving, a song this world knows nothing about.

It can't sing it, Lord, because it's born of the spirit of God. So, Father, thank you, Lord. Thank you for this celebration today, for the lives of God on this platform and in this sanctuary, for a song that is not a show.

Lord, it is real. It emanates from the heart. Father, we thank you for it with all of our heart today in Jesus' name.

Now, let me begin this morning by just reading to you from Luke chapter 2, such a familiar Christmas passage, beginning at verse 8. Now, there 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. Then the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

In other words, this story and what it contains is good news from God, and it should produce a great joy in your heart. And if it hasn't produced that joy yet, ask yourself the simple question, why? Why don't I fully understand or appreciate the joy of this divine moment in history? And the message and the joy is to everybody, to all people, all races, all colors, all languages, all levels of education, every strata of society, rich, poor, free, in prison. The message is to everybody.

I thank God for the goodness of God. I thank God that he's not exclusive. He didn't come to just a select or elect few.

He came to all people everywhere who could call out to the name of God with this great news. For there's born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, and this will be a sign to you. You shall 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 like to say it this way. It's as if all of heaven was leaning on that canopy that separates heaven and eternity from the earth.

And there was such a multitude of them that suddenly seeing what was happening, seeing what God was about to do, understanding the incredible journey that he had just made to come to the earth to get you and to get me. It's as if they couldn't contain it anymore. And they burst through that canopy that separates heaven from the earth and began to worship glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill towards men.

You know, the Bible says in the book of Hebrews, the angels don't fully understand the depth of God's love for you or for me. It's something they long to look into. They saw him, they would see him every day in his glory.

They would understand the majesty, things that we have conceptually, they would see it. They would understand this incredible majesty and the beauty of God, the holiness of God. The Bible says that everywhere and at all times around about the throne of God, there are angelic beings crying, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts.

Heaven and the earth are filled with his glory and they cease not to praise him day and night and lacking adequate words. I suppose they just, all they can say is holy. In other words, so other, so beautiful, so full of majesty, so glorious is our God.

The heaven and the earth are filled with his glory, glory to God. What were they really singing about? Well, let's start at the beginning. First of all, the angel of the Lord came to shepherds living out in their fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

You know, in all of our Christmas productions in churches and things like that, you always have these shepherds so majestically standing, staring at the sky, dressed in their fine robes and the sheep just kind of casually out in the field, just munching away on grass, which they don't, by the way, at night, they don't eat at night. I was a shepherd. I know what I'm talking about.

Sheep are afraid of the dark. Did you know that? You didn't know that. That's why you're afraid of the dark.

That's why you need a nightlight on at night, or you leave the light on in the bathroom down the hall because there's an inherent fear of the dark in sheep. And the shepherds, folks, it was not a really a noble

profession. I hate to have to tell you this, but if you do some research, you'll find it yourself.

Shepherds were, you became a shepherd in that generation, basically, if you couldn't get a job, you couldn't do anything else. You became a shepherd. And so you have a whole bunch of guys gathered around in a field.

They really don't want to be where they are. They don't like what they're doing. They don't like the job they have.

It's cold at night. So they have a campfire. They're probably all sitting around the campfire.

The sheep are in close because, of course, sheep are afraid of the dark. So they would not be distant from the campfire. They would pull in close.

The shepherds are sitting around the campfire. What do you think they're talking about? I hate this job would be number one. Number two, taxes.

For sure they're talking about taxes because they're being rerouted to their cities of origin, their towns of origin, so they can be counted, so they can be ultimately taxed. So number one, I hate this job. Number two, the little bit we do make is 50% of it's going in taxes or whatever the percentage was back then, or maybe even 100% in some cases, who knows what was happening.

They were tired of the oppression of the Roman Empire coming in and marginalizing them and the people and ridiculing their faith and their profession and their culture. They had a lot of complaints. And the fourth thing, of course, they're talking about is girls.

I have no doubt about that. For real. It's a bunch of guys around the campfire.

Come on, girls, don't be so sanctimonious here today. What are you talking about? Yeah, you know exactly what you're talking about. One time I was at Summit International School of Ministry and a bunch of guys asked Pastor Teresa if they could get together to talk with me.

And I said, oh, sure, no problem. So they all crowded into this one room and they're all in a circle on the floor and they're three or four deep. And then so they had this one guy that they set up to ask all the questions.

So he had a binder and he's asking me these chicken and egg theological questions. And I had a sense in my heart, this is not what this meeting is about. You know, it's not about predestination.

It's not about all this stuff. So finally, I looked at the guys and I said, what do you really want to talk about? What is this meeting about? And then finally, a guy from New York. Thank God he had the courage to say, girls, we want to talk about girls.

So finally, the binder goes away. The theological questions are gone. Like, how do you know that she's the right one? And how do you do this as a Christian? And we knew how to do this before we got saved.

But, you know, so I have no doubt that's what the shepherds are talking about. It was the night shift. But the beauty of it all is this is where God chose to make the greatest event in all of history known.

Isn't that amazing? Paul, the apostle says in the book of Corinthians, consider your calling, not many mighty, not many noble, not many wise after the flesh. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world and things which are weak and things which are despised. And he's chosen you.

He's chosen me, not in our strength, but in our weakness. And the angel, the messenger of the Lord, stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. And they were greatly afraid.

Now, they probably didn't know that much theology, but they knew this one thing, that even the reflection of God could kill you if you had sin in your life. They all knew that. Everybody in Israel knew that.

Everybody in the Old Testament knew that. The reflection. Remember when Moses came down off the mountain, when he was talking with God in the book of Exodus, just the reflection of God on his face caused such fear in the people that he had to cover his face.

The reflection of God. People in the Old Testament, if it was just an angel that appeared beside an altar, an angel that appeared in a room, they would be afraid that they were going to die because God was so holy and sinful flesh or those created in his image that were living in darkness could not appear in the sight of a holy God without suffering a physical death. Think about that for a moment.

Thank God we're not living in the Old Testament. If the Lord himself were to appear or to send an angel into the sanctuary in the Old Testament, people would start to die in their seats. If there was willful, unconfessed sin in your life, if you were not completely righteous in the sight of God, you would die.

No wonder the shepherds were afraid. Then the angel said to them, don't be afraid for I bring you good news, good tidings of great joy to all people. For to you is born this day in the city of David, a savior who is Christ the Lord.

And here's the sign to you. Here's the sign that what I'm telling you about is good news of great joy. And it's to everybody.

Here's the sign. You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. You will find God coming to us as a baby.

The one who carries the universe in the palm of his hand, the one who gives life and breath to all things, came to this world in a form where he had to be carried. He had to learn how to speak. He came in the weakest of human form, which is a baby.

A baby can't walk. A baby can't reason. A baby can't talk.

A baby can't feed itself. A baby can't change itself. God, God, God, God came to us.

He could have come as a 15-foot angel. He could have come as a fully mature man at 30 years of age. He could have come in a flaming chariot.

He could have come as a divine being. He could have come and conclusively proven his Godhead, may I put it that way, or his Godness. Instead, he comes to us as a baby in the lowest, in the weakest form of humanity, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, wrapped in strips of rags, strips of cloth.

God, God, shedding his robes of righteousness that the Bible says literally filled the temple and allowing himself to come down in the weakest form of humanity and wrapped in strips of cloth. It reminds me that

when you and I become believers in Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us that his Holy Spirit comes and actually dwells in our physical body. And is it not true that God not only identifies with our weakness, but he wraps himself? If you have the Holy Spirit inside of your body, God has chosen to wrap himself in the rags of your weakness, the rags of your failure, the rags of your sin, the rags of your struggle.

Isn't it true? If you have the Holy Spirit inside of you, that's what he has chosen to wrap himself in. God of the universe has wrapped himself in me. And if that doesn't cause us to bend our knee, if that doesn't cause us to shout Hosanna, if that doesn't do something within us, then we don't fully understand the greatness of what God has done.

And lying in a manger of all places, not in the Marriott, in the manger. Now I was a shepherd. I had a barn.

I understand some of these things. In a manger, you've got excrement on the floor. You have these nice little sanitary things that we have on stage for the Christmas production.

You bring on the odd donkey or sheep and you just hope they don't do their business on the platform. Well, they do their business in a stable. It smells like ammonia.

It stinks. As a matter of fact, it smells so bad, it gets on your clothes. When I was a farmer, I always knew when I would go to the local feed store, what kind of a farm the other people in there ran because you could smell whatever the animal was on their clothes.

So he went down and he's born as the weakest of humanity. He wraps himself in the rags of our failure and he's born in a place where it just doesn't get any worse. It's cold.

It stinks. It's not sanitary. You see, here's the message.

There's nowhere you can go that God won't come and get you. You see, to the shepherds, the angel said, this is the sign. This is the sign.

You know, we so casually have read that story for so many years and there's such a scant understanding of it because maybe it's tradition just took away the real meaning of what it's really all about. God came for me. He's not waiting on this platform for you today.

He's not waiting in church for you. He came to get you where you are. He came to get you in your mess.

He came to get you in your weakness. He came to get you in the rags that you found yourself wrapped in to be God to you. No wonder the heavenly host burst through that canopy and they started to sing glory to God in the highest.

Glory to God in the highest. Glory to God that he would do this for us, that he would come down to where we are, that he would go to the lowest. You can't go lower than where he went and that was the sign.

That was the sign to you and I. You can't go lower than where he went. I'll come to you in your weakness. I'll come to you in your mess.

I'll come to you in your stents. I'll come to you in your rags. I'll come and be God to you.

I will come and reclaim you as my own. I will cleanse you. I will save you.

I will wash away your sin. I will live inside of you for the rest of your life on this earth and then for all of eternity. No wonder the angels burst through.

No wonder they couldn't contain it anymore. No wonder they burst through that canopy singing glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill towards men. Peace to the creation of God.

Peace to those who had imbibed as it is the thinking and the spirit of this world and that becomes so distant and alienated from God but the Bible tells us that God so loved you. God so loved you that he gave his only begotten son. Whoever believes in him should not perish.

That means should not have an eternal death, an eternal separation from God but have everlasting life. The shepherd said let's go and see this thing which has been announced to us. You ever noticed seems to be always the night shift that finds him first.

He walks in this world as a the son of God. He's raising the dead. He's calming the wind.

He's stopping the seas. He's giving blind men sight. Lepers are being cleansed.

It's truly amazing what's happening. The religious are scratching their beards trying to figure out how could a prophet come out of such and such a city but the blind man on the side of the road is calling out oh son of David have mercy on me. A woman who was sick in her body is pressing through the crowd just to touch the hem of his garment.

The lepers are crying out have mercy on us son of David thou Christ of God have mercy on us and everyone who cried out to him was healed. Everyone was touched. Everyone.

He took the stench of the iniquity of everyone's sin upon himself. See you might be here today and you say well what right do I have to come to God? Where I'm living and what I'm thinking what I've been doing and where I've been I'll never be able to walk with him because I'm so weak and all of that is true. That's why he came to you.

That's why he came to you. You couldn't get to him so he came to get to you. All he requires all he requires of you and of me is an admission.

An admission that we need a Savior. An admission that we need a Savior and that a Savior has come to us. Say God if you came to get me in my weakness then Lord I'm not going to do any different than the shepherds did.

I'm going to open my heart to you and I'm going to come to where you are because you came to where I am. You appeared to me. You see if your heart is being stirred this very moment you've been stirred by the songs it's become because he's come to you.

He's come to you this morning. He's come to get you. That's why your heart's beating in your chest right now because he's come to get you.

In your own mind would say God could this be true? Could it be true? I said that in 1978 when I first heard it. I said God could this be true? Could my could the wrongs that I've done be washed away? Could I could I become a new person? God would you be willing to wrap yourself in the rags of my life? My confusion, my struggle, my trials, my weaknesses. Would you be willing to do that for me? The Bible says that if Christ is in any man he becomes a new creation or any woman they become a new creation.

It's called being born again. Sort of like helium inside of a balloon causes you to be able to rise above the circumstances all around you and to live in the newness of life. It was in 1978 that I prayed and said oh God if this is true if this is true I open my heart to you.

I knew I couldn't live for him. I knew I didn't have the strength. I knew there were issues in my character I could never change but I believed that he could.

This incredible thought that he had come to get me and I just said if it's true Lord I open my heart and I invite you to come into my life and I ask you to be my Lord and my Savior. I didn't feel a thing. Some people think you have to feel something.

I didn't feel anything, nothing. I didn't even feel any different. I went and I worked my regular shift as a police officer and then in the morning I woke up and when my feet touched the floor I can remember it like it was an hour ago.

I knew in my heart something had changed. I was different inside and for all these years the Lord has walked with me through my struggles and trials. He's chosen to wrap himself.

You see if the Holy Spirit is inside of you he's the third person of God. When you receive Christ the Holy Spirit comes and takes up his residence inside your physical body. That's the evidence that you become a child of God.

Then you begin to change line by line, step by step, little by little. He promises a new heart, a new mind, and a new spirit, a new heart. That's why I care today.

I didn't care 40 years ago but I care today because he gives us a new heart. That's why we care that you've come to visit today. That's why we care that you're listening to these words today and you're listening to these songs because his heart has become our heart.

In the same way that he came to get us we are now messengers with the same heart coming for you so that you might know him as your savior as we do. It is an amazing journey one you will never regret and you'll find yourself singing glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill towards men. You'll find yourself singing the song that the angel sang if you are willing to open your heart to Jesus Christ.

You know today that what I'm telling you is the truth. You know it in your heart even though your mind might try to argue against it inside your own heart because you were created by God in the image of God and for God. You are the only thing created in the image of God and because you are you can still recognize when God is calling you and speaking to you and there's something in your heart as there was in mine 40 years ago that said God this is true even though my mind wants to argue against it in my heart I know this is true.

You may never have a chance to hear this again and so at this moment I want to open in a sense the canopy of heaven and give you a chance today to sing with the angels. Give you a chance to be born again by the spirit of God. Give you a chance to let the Holy Spirit come into your life.

Let God wrap himself in your weakness and your rags and your mess and take you to the place that he longs for you to be and has always designed you to live in. It's a miracle journey folks. It's a miracle journey.

You look back you get to live as old as I am and you get you look back and say oh God oh God oh God that other people could know this journey and understand this is true this is real this is not a religious trip this is real this is a relationship with the living God. Pastor Tracy and I are married 40 years today and I want to tell you we wouldn't be married 40 years today if I hadn't come to Christ. That is a miracle in itself.

I was too selfish, too angry to ever be a husband, to ever be committed, to ever be a good father. Only God, only God, only God. She was perfect and I was a mess.

At least that's what I'm told. It is joyful to live for God. It's wonderful to live for God.

It's not sorrowful. And so today I want to just ask you to do something simple. If there's even a chance in your heart, even a chance sir, even a chance ma'am that you could say that what you're hearing might be true, would you at least give God a chance? That was my prayer in 1978 was Lord if this is true what I have heard, if, it was a sincere if, if it's true I open my heart to you.

I invite you to come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior. It was just an if, but it was a sincere if and it was good enough for God to come to me and take up residence inside of my life. And if that if is in your heart today, some of you may be convinced, some may not be convinced, but if you will just open your heart and let God be God to you, you will be utterly amazed at where he will take you and what he will do in your life.

I want you, when I get to the throne of God one day, I want you to be there. I care. It's not all just about numbers.

It's not all about just filling a house. It's about you. It's about you.

I want you to be there. So I'm going to ask, if you would like to open your heart and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior here in the main sanctuary, the Education Annex, North Jersey, and anybody at home online, would you just join with me and just raise your hand? That's all I'm asking you to do. All over.

Just raise your hand. God bless you. Just raise them up high, up in the balcony.

If you raised your hand, would you take a step of faith with me and just stand up right where you are? Please, just stand. If you raised your hand. Thank you, Lord.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Jesus.

I can feel the angels about to bust through the canopy again. Now, if you stood up and you raised your hand, I'm going to ask you to come and just join me right here. I'm going to lead you in a prayer.

Just slip out wherever you are. Just let these folks come out. Let them out of their seat, please, everybody.

Come on. Come on. Just come.

Just start coming. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Jesus. Up in the balcony, the annex.

We'll wait for you. Make your way down here in the annex. We'll wait for you.

Praise be to God. Praise be to God. Praise be to God.

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 and goodwill towards men. There's no greater decision in your life that you'll ever make than this. You are going to be born again by the Spirit of God.

When we pray this prayer, Jesus will receive you as his own and the Spirit of God, the third person of God, will come and live inside and make your body his dwelling place. He will wrap himself in your rags, identify with your weakness, and lift you out of your mess into the place where God himself designed you to be and make you into the person that he has always longed for you to be, and you have always longed to be that kind of a person. Today, it starts all over again.

No matter how old you are or how much you've done or where you've been, it all starts over again. New heart, a new home, a new marriage, a new family. Behold, God says, I make all things.

I make everything new, everything, everything. Now, open your heart and make this your own prayer. I'm going to lead you in it.

It's a simple prayer, but make it your own. Pray with me, please. Lord Jesus, thank you for loving me in all my mess, all my struggles, all my weakness.

Thank you for coming to get me and not leaving me because you love me. This day, I open my heart and I ask you to come into my life and be my God and my Savior. I believe that you were born and you died to pay the price for the wrong things that I have done.

And you were raised from the dead to show me that as I trust in you, I too will be given new life. I believe this. I believe that heaven will be my home when I die because you have cleansed me and you have received me as your very own.

From this day forward, I am a child of God. I belong to God and God belongs to me. Help me to walk with you and to fully understand the plan that you have for the rest of my life.

I love you, Jesus. Thank you for first loving me. Together, we'll walk through this life now.

I am a child of God. Amen.

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