

# Sermon, Christmas Eve-Eve and Eve, 2022

Isaiah 62:6-12; Luke 2:8-20

“The Promise of the King”

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If you were with us a few weeks ago, we talked about how this season, the Advent/Christmas season, is one filled with tradition. Traditions that we would rather not be trifled with, thank you very much. From when you open presents, to Christmas cookies, favorite foods, or attending a candlelight service, there are just things we like to wrap ourselves around at this time of year.

For many people, it's watching favorite Christmas movies. Do you have a favorite Christmas movie? It could be an old classic like *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street* or *A Christmas Carol*, *It's a wonderful Life*. The Rankin and Bass Christmas specials like *Rudolph* or *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*, Or *A Christmas Story*. If you love *A Christmas story*, make sure you don't miss it, they are only showing it 4,000 times in the next two to three days.

Sometimes, though, they are difficult to watch. Last year about this time of year, we watched a movie called *The Nativity*, And I want to say it's very well done. It's a good movie, and I want to say that up front because it's going to sound like I didn't like it, and I did. But it's a hard movie to watch.

And the reason it's hard to watch is the realism put into the movie. When we read the Nativity story in the Bible, it doesn't seem that bad. But for the first readers, this entire thing must have filled them with horror.

It's a long way from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Even in the best of circumstances, let alone a pregnant wife. We see how difficult it is for Joseph and Mary. It's a long hard trip. Sometimes she walks, sometimes she rides. It's a tough and tedious trip. Joseph and Mary don't have much in the way of money, so they experience hardship trying to ration out what food they had and making sure they could find food. But always Joseph makes sure that Mary has enough even if he doesn't.

But the hardest part of the story, at least for me watching, is that Mary and Joseph think several times that they have reached Bethlehem. Oh, surely this is it, we see a gathering of many people, surely more than Mary and Joseph were used to being around. and it's just a gathering of people close to a watering hole. They move on, oh, finally we have found Bethlehem. Nope, it's just a village. Oh, finally look at this place this, this is Bethlehem, or no, Bethlehem is 25 more miles that way.

And so the movie in some ways becomes a roller coaster of emotions. Hope and disappointment. False trials and unmet expectations. A long journey that seems even when they are trying to be faithful filled with disappointment.

Maybe it's a hard movie to watch simply because it touches so close to home for so many people. It's a parallel for many of our spiritual journeys. Many of us spend a good portion of our lives looking for a place to belong. We look for something in our lives that will give us meaning. Or that will give us purpose. Time after time, we think we have found meaning and purpose, our Bethlehem, only to be told no, this isn't it. In time, it disappoints us, it lets us down and we find ourselves moving on. At some point, we wonder is there anything in life, anyone, that won't disappoint me in the end?

Joseph and Mary do, by the way reach their destination. They reach Bethlehem, they come to the stable, and there in the manger they are given the greatest gift the world has ever known, the gift of Jesus, The Son of God. If your life has been filled with disappointment, quiet desperation, if your heart longs for something more, we want to invite you to come like Mary and Joseph, come to the manger, gaze upon the Holy Child, and find that which the journey of your life had longed for.

We've had a great time over the past few weeks talking about the promises of Jesus. The entire Bible is filled with the promises of who Jesus is and what He will do for us, in us, and through us. Tonight, we look at the Promise of Jesus as our King.

Oh, I know the idea of a King seems a bit odd for us. We like the idea of independence, of making our own decisions, of not being under anyone's authority. And yet, I would suggest it's that very idea that we know what's best for us, that we can figure life out on our own, that led us into so much disappointment in life. But we come when we allow Jesus to become the king of our lives; it's there that our lives are transformed.

When we give Jesus authority over our lives, when we give ourselves to Him, we experience the blessing of our transformation. Jesus trades our darkness for light. There is a reason Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus can turn your darkness into light. In the light, we find direction. We can see our path more clearly. We see what is truly valuable in life and what is not. We see that we do not need to be afraid of and have so much anxiety in life. We see what is real and what is not. Of course, in the light, we also see ourselves as we really are, not as we would like to be, and that exposure can be painful.

Jesus trades our hopelessness for hope. How can we not look in the manger and not have hope. This is how much God loves you. You can't look in the manger and see the face of God and think you are not loved, that God does not care for you. It is the hope that darkness will not always hold sway. It's the hope that says God has a purpose for you, has a plan for you. It's a hope that says just as the evening passes into day, just as the night is broken by the cry of a baby, that whatever you are dealing with will not last. It need not defeat you, have hope.

When we give Jesus authority, kingship, over our lives, He trades our enslavement for freedom. So many people, so many of us even believers can be weighed down. Weighed down by the chains of our past. Weighed down by the chains of guilt, weighed down by the shackles of grief, weighed down by the manacles of sin. My friends, Jesus has come to set you free. He can set you free from your past. He can heal your grief. Not only has Jesus come to forgive your sin, but to break the power that sin has over us. You do not have to live in a place where sin controls your life. Holiness and righteousness await you. You can be free, the King will not disappoint.

And the King will trade your mourning into joy. When was the last time you have had real joy. Oh, I know we sing Joy to the world, but when was the last time you have had real joy, a joy that outlasts your circumstances. A joy that isn't dependent on your circumstances. That Happiness, happiness comes out of your circumstances. Someone tells you a joke and you laugh. And then it dies down. But joy, real true joy that abides even when life is full of disappointment, when was the last time you experienced that joy?

Often, we don't have joy because something or someone has stolen it from us. It's that nagging voice in your head that tells you, you don't deserve to be happy. It's that part of you that's waiting for the other shoe to drop. I'm happy now, but what's the catch? Jesus has come not to steal your joy but to give it to you. The joy of a savior. The joy of being free. The joy of not having to live in darkness any longer. The joy of maybe for the first time in your life having hope.

Tonight, we want to invite you to find your Bethlehem. We invite you to find peace and rest. Give Jesus the authority over your life tonight. Allow Him to be King and bring His promise. You will find hope, you will find rest. Come and find the light that takes away the darkness in the world. Come and find the hope that says a new day has come, the old has passed away. Come and find the freedom that says you need not be weighed down. Come and find joy. Come and find Christ here in the manger. Amen.