

THE MESSAGE for Christmas Eve 2011

Luke 2:8-20

With Us and For Us

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The Christmas story tells us that God is with us and God is for us...

Christmas is the season for gift-giving. It's something God started in the beginning. God is the giver of gifts. So it's appropriate for us to give gifts at Christmas too.

Did you hear about the grandmother who could not decide what gift to give her three grandchildren for Christmas? She decided to simply put a check for \$25 in each Christmas card with a handwritten message '*buy your own gift*'. She put the cards in the mail and watched as the mail carrier took them off to their destination. Then to her surprise she found the three checks on the table under the newspaper. She forgot to put the checks in the envelope with the Christmas cards. Her grandchildren were shocked when they opened their Christmas gift from grandma, only to find a message "BUY YOUR OWN GIFT".

That's not what they were expecting, I'm sure! Did you ever get a Christmas gift you were not expecting? Truth is, Jesus is the gift the world was not expecting either.

Tonight we celebrate the greatest gift ever given – Jesus, the Son of God, the King of kings, The Lord of lords, the Prince of Peace, the Savior of the world.

Tonight we are also reminded that:

The King of kings wasn't born to a princess in a warm palace. He was born to a servant girl in a cold manger.

The Lord of lords was not wrapped in velvet robes but rather in swaddling clothes.

The Prince of Peace came into a world full of turmoil with no room for him and still is to this day.

The Savior's birth was not announced to the rulers of this world, but to the lowly shepherds watching their flocks by night.

The babe lying in the manger is God's gift to us and that gift has made all the difference in the world. It means God is with us and God is for us.

God so loved the world that God became one of us in Jesus entering our world to change everything for good. Jesus came not to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Perhaps you have heard peoples say, "Jesus is the reason for the season" but I want to suggest to you that perhaps we are the reason for the season. We are the object of God's love. God shows up where we least expect, in ways that we least expect, and for those we least expect.

The Creator of the universe, the majestic and mysterious One, immortal, invisible God only wise became visible and vulnerable for you and for me and for all peoples. He came for those who feel they don't deserve it, don't have it all together, haven't got a prayer, feel lonely and vulnerable, know their lives are broken beyond repair, know they have made a mess of their lives...

Jesus comes because God's love for us isn't based on our worthiness, but on God's goodness and grace in Jesus. Because of Jesus we know that God is with us and God is for us.

A grandfather was visiting his grandson one Christmas when he walked into the family room and saw the toddler standing up in his playpen, crying his little eyes out. It was obvious he had been crying for quite some time. When little Bobby saw his grandpa, his face lit up and his hands reached out pleading, "Out, papa, out!" What grandfather could resist this plea? He walked over to the playpen and reached down to lift his little buddy out of captivity.

Just then, "Law and Order" stepped into the room with a dishtowel in her hand and a frown on her face. She spoke sternly, "Bobby, you know better. You're being punished. Leave him right there, dad." With that she turned around and marched out of the room.

Grandpa didn't know what to do. Bobby's tears and outstretched hands tugged at his heart, but he didn't want to interfere with a mother's discipline, either. He couldn't stand being in the same room and not do something, but he couldn't leave without feeling like a traitor. What's a grandpa to do?

He then had an idea, a brilliant idea, a grace filled idea. Since he couldn't take Bobby out of the playpen, he decided to climb in with him. And that's just what he did.

That is the gift of Christmas. God has entered into our world, into our playpen, into our lives, not because we deserve it, but because God loves us. Jesus is God's gift to you. God is with us and God is for us. Merry Christmas! Amen.