

CHRISTMAS C
December 24, 2009
Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ

Luke 2:1-20

Longing for Christmas

This is the long-awaited night. The night on which some of our deepest human longings are met. For some of us, it's fulfillment of that Christmas wish list. For others, it is time spent with family and friends. I'm sure each and every one of us has a lengthy wish list this Christmas Eve.

But on Christmas, it is our *ultimate* human longing that is fulfilled. The ultimate human longing is to know that there truly is a God that is in control of the universe. A God who loves us. A God who wants to be in relationship with us.

For Christians, that longing is fulfilled in Jesus. The God who loves us enough to have taken on our human form, to have been born in the flesh, in the most earthly and normal of ways. Born into a human family Jesus lived as a person to accomplish for us what we could not do for ourselves: to be restored to our created position as children of God.

Martin Luther said that this incarnation – God coming in human form – is a mystery. He said that, “The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding.”¹

But is it truly beyond our human understanding? Or is it simply too incredible to be believed? Is it too incredible to think that our God would stoop to human form, in order to bring about our ultimate reconciliation, restoring us into relationship as His sons and daughters?

There is a new Christmas song by a Christian group called Downhere. I heard it for the first time only this week. If you have access to the internet at home, please take the time to listen to this song. It's called "How Many Kings."

The words of this song describe this incredible event of just how far God went to bring about our reconciliation with Him, and the depth of God's love for us. It goes like this:

Follow the star to a place unexpected
Would you believe after all we've projected
A child in a manger
Lowly and small, the weakest of all
Unlikeliness hero, wrapped in his mothers shawl
Just a child
Is this who we've waited for?

How many kings, stepped down from their thrones?
How many lords have abandoned their homes?
How many greats have become the least for me?
How many Gods have poured out their hearts
To romance a world that has torn all apart?
How many fathers gave up their sons for me?
Only one did that for me

All for me
All for you²

This is the fulfillment of our deepest human longing – Jesus, the God who came to us, born into our world nearly 2,000 years ago. The Son of God, come into the world, to heal a broken creation. All for me, all for you. To fulfill our ultimate human longing – to be restored to relationship with God.

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Scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer once said "The best way to send an idea is to wrap it up in a person." So what message could God possibly be trying to send to us in sending His Son, Jesus? The message is that God, too, has a deep longing. There is something that God wanted on that first Christmas, and has wanted not only every Christmas since, but *every single day* since that first Christmas.

The thing that God most wants is to restore us into relationship as His daughters and sons. He wants that so much to have taken human form in the person of Jesus and live the sinless life that we cannot live, so that the power of sin and death over our lives is vanquished. We are restored as God's daughters and sons, so that we can live eternally with Him in His kingdom. All this because of Jesus.

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In this Christmas story we heard tonight, we are the shepherds. We, like them, were the ones who were on the margins of society. We are the Gentiles unfortunate enough to have been born outside of the covenant.

And yet, we are the ones blessed to have heard the pronouncement that God has come to us in Jesus. We, like those shepherds, have been brought near to God by this miraculous news. We who were once far off have been brought near to God by Jesus, this God-man who came into our world as the most powerless of people, a little baby.

In this Christmas miracle, our deepest human longing is met: To be once again brought close to God. At the same time, God's deepest longing is met: To bring us near to Him.

And, like those shepherds who were the first to hear of this miraculous birth, we now have a mission: To go and tell that world about what God has done for us. To tell everyone that Jesus is the one we've waited for. To tell the story that God loves us so much He stepped down from His heavenly throne, all for me, all for you. Amen.

<922 words>

¹ Martin Luther, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther* (London: H.G. Bohn, 1857), 79.

² Downhere, "How Many Kings" on the album *How Many Kings: Songs for Christmas* (Franklin, TN: Centricity Music, October 6, 2009). Listen here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lw3EG6kVNtI&feature=Playlist&p=27D3B6107EFF709F&index=0&playnext=1>