

Sermon: What We Do With Christmas**Scripture: Luke 1:46-56****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: December 14, 2025**

What do we do with Christmas? It's outrageous what we are preparing to celebrate: that the Great Creator of All That Is, at a particular point in time, in a particular place, was BORN! Think about that for a moment. God, Beyond Whom There is No Other, Without Whom No Thing Could Be, God, The Power Above All Power, The Depth Below all Depth, one silent night, holy night - at let's say 1:37am - we don't know for sure - was pushed out of a young woman's birth canal, slimy with after-birth, crying with his first breath, and born into this world.

And if that was not enough, the situation into which God was born heaps layer upon layer of outrageousness. Born in Bethlehem about 2000 years ago, his mother was named Mary and had a boyfriend named Joe. I mean could there be two more normal sounding people in a more forgettable place at a more -yawn- uninteresting time in all the world? And yet we say that this was when and this was how and these were the people to whom God interpreted Godself to the whole world. I mean what was God's point? To come as unimpressively as possibly?

They were poor, uneducated, peasantry, as Jews, they were a hardly tolerated minority in the Roman empire. She was unwed and a woman. Joseph, the man in the equation, could take no credit for the conception which put Mary at a huge risk of shame if not execution in that patriarchal culture at that time. The most in-the-know people of that day barely blinked an eye, would not have even noticed, this birth of God, so quietly and discrete did He come, had not a load of wealthy foreigners come asking

about him and calling him a King. That perked Herod's ears up and he did what all despot rulers do, he organized a campaign to rid the country of the troublemakers, saying something like... and I quote, "they're garbage, their region stinks, they do nothing but bitch, let them go back to where they came from." It's what all despots do - scapegoat the easiest people they can find to blame for their country's troubles. The Jews have known this truth throughout their history and up to last night, the Gazans know it as well, the Ukrainians, the immigrants in our own country know this dehumanizing and scapegoating practice of despots. It's one of the oldest stories in the book. And the way God comes, as poor refugee child of the Jewish people is in direct contradiction to that story. But it doesn't bring the story to a conclusion unfortunately, and this is because God comes not violently to right all our wrongs but God comes as Love and love will not force its way even when facing despots. Love won't collude with tyrants either but as far as a method of ridding the world of them, love is hardly a very efficient tool. This is why 2000 years later such tedious powermongers are still alive and kickin' and making a mess of things. And yet Christmas still insists that God comes small, insignificant and with love.

So then what do we do with Christmas when it runs directly counter to all our notions of power, status, respect, control and domination, all of it systematically snubbed when the Source of All Meaning revealed himself to this world in an embarrassing, weak, pitiful, scandalous way. What do we do with that?

I don't know.

I mean, I DO know what we usually do with it, we package it in pretty paper and domesticate it and tie a bow on the whole thing and say – "awww, isn't that adorable of God to come as a baby?!"

No it's not adorable.

It's sacrilege to how we live as Americans, how God comes.

It's scandalous to even us Christians, many of whom think we should make our country great again by marrying state power with our religion.

We are so NOT ok with the weak way God comes, as poor, refugee, and eventually executed criminal. But that's God, for you. That's God FOR you.

To the question "where is God in all this injustice, violence, suffering and evil that's in the world?!" And Christmas will give the same answer given by the Jewish writer Ellie Wiesel witnessing a young Jewish boy being hung in a prison camp. Asked "Where is God in this?" He said "God is there hanging on the gallows." Christmas does not offer that answer in despair but in a promise of solidarity, accompaniment in the deepest sorrows and greatest sufferings of being human, God is there, suffering alongside the victims whose Hannuake joy turned to ashes in Sydney Australia and the victims at Brown University. I'm not sure how satisfactory an answer that is to anyone evaluating it intellectually, that God suffers with we who suffer, but to those who *experience* it, who know God is with them in their anguish...

But considering the course of history, we've much liked that answer. We still feel like we can improve upon God's idea of how God comes and so we try to take the reins of power, (the ring of power), believing that we are different, that we are the ones crowned to finally get this right. But we are wrong. As the Apostle Paul puts it, God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom. God's weakness is more powerful than human strength. God's degradation is more honorable than all human honor. And Jesus, his birth, the way he lived his life, the way he died, the way he returned in forgiveness

and love all exemplifies this radical, scandalous, outrageous nature of the one we call God.

So what do we do with Christmas arriving for another year amidst such strife and hate? If we truly believe that God, Beyond Whom There is No Other, Without Whom No Thing Could Be, God, The Power Above All Power, The Depth Beneath all Depth, one night at 1:37am was born to a poor unwed Jewish mother from po-dunk Bethlehem, Palestine, who had to run to seek refuge from a violent King... if we truly believe that that is how God comes then what do we do with Christmas and what does Christmas ask of us. What do we do with Christmas?

I do not know.

I have no answer this morning.

But I guess we could start by thanking God that the story is still told after all these years, despite how we tend to ignore its outrageousness.

Deo Gracias, that the story is still told despite us.

Deo Gracias, thanks be to God for how God comes.

And maybe we pray this year we'll allow Christmas and the God of love to have its way with us.

Deo Gracias!