

Community Church of Issaquah

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He Is Here!

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Every Christmas there are so many unanswered questions about the birth of Jesus. But to truly understand the reality of Christmas, we must understand the world into which Jesus was born. It was a world that was filled with fear and oppression. The Romans ruled with iron fists and very heavy taxes that supported their oversight and their huge armies. Many people lived in poverty, and many were homeless. Violence was much too common. And sadly, the people of that time felt that God has abandoned them and were distant from Him. In their Jewish traditions, there had been centuries when there were no prophets to keep the people in their faith.

Let me ask, does that sound something like the world you and I are living in? The world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is ruled by technology, the wealthy, and oppressors, too. The people today are noted to be filled with fear, division, loneliness and much suffering. So many people are struggling with health issues, financial worries and broken relationships. Like the people in the days of Jesus' birth, many have lost faith that God will do something to make it better – that He would do anything. Our world and that world are so much alike that we sometimes miss the truth about Christmas. Christmas is not a time for God to come into a perfect world, but a time for God to come to the

broken world. It came with the birth of Jesus, the Promised One.

Never did a birth bring greater joy to more people than did the birth of Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ was prophesied centuries before His arrival. It is, after all, the nativity of our Lord Jesus that provides the backdrop to our own Christmas celebrations. Although the circumstances of that birth were unusual, they were not unnatural. In fact, the act by which His mother brought Him forth probably differed very little from any other birth. Its significance rested in how it originated and what it all meant. Even though it was prophesied centuries before by the prophet Isaiah (chapter 7 verse 14), “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” it didn’t seem that anything was prepared for what was about to happen. The name Immanuel by the way means ‘God with us.’

The visits of the angels to Elizabeth, Zaccariah, Mary and Joseph laid the groundwork for what was to happen in the days to come. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Joseph was required by the dictate of law that he must go to Bethlehem to register with the census. Few give notice to the place which Joseph and Mary went to from their home in Nazareth. Bethlehem, meaning the ‘city of bread,’ was the city where David of Old Testament fame grew up. That the child of Mary would be born in the city of David as foretold was no accident. It was part of the fulfillment of God’s plan in sending His Son to fulfill His promise. From Jesus’ birth in the city of bread to His sharing the truth

that He was the 'bread of life,' to the last dinner with his disciples when he took the bread, broke it and said, 'this is my body.' God had a masterful plan.

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And yet, even when there was no room in the inn, God still came. Jesus was laid in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. The King of Kings chose humility over comfort.

The Lord of Heaven chose vulnerability over power.

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The Gospel of Luke tells us that in the days of Caesar Augustus, while empires ruled and history marched forward with little concern for the poor or the powerless, God chose a moment that seemed utterly ordinary. A census. A journey. A young couple. A stable. No royal procession. No trumpets. No palace. And yet, this quiet night would change everything. The birth of Jesus Christ reminds us that God does not work according to our expectations. He works according to His love.

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When the angels announce Christ’s birth, they do not go to kings or priests. They go to shepherds ordinary, overlooked, working-class people, watching sheep in the dark. Shepherds were not considered important. Their work was dirty and demanding. Yet heaven’s glory appears to them first. Why? Because the birth of God’s Redeemer, His Son Jesus, is good news for all people. Not just the powerful. Not just the righteous. Not just the successful. Christmas proclaims that God sees the forgotten, values the humble, and invites the ordinary into His extraordinary story. The angel told the shepherds, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” Not some people. Not privileged people. But all people. That includes you and me.

Christmas reminds us that peace is not something we achieve, it is something we receive. Jesus did not come to give us a temporary calm. He came to bring lasting peace between God and humanity. Peace with God. This peace would not come without a very real cost. The manger where the infant was laid points forward to the cross. The baby wrapped in cloths would one day be wrapped in burial linens. Christmas and Easter are inseparable. Christ was born to die—and to rise again—so that we might live.

God did not remain distant. He came near. God did not speak only through prophets. He spoke through His Son. Jesus experienced hunger and fatigue. He knew joy and sorrow. He wept. He laughed. He suffered. He loved. In Christ, God fully entered the human experience. This means that whatever we are experiencing today, God understands. He is not a distant observer. He is Emmanuel—God with us. Christmas assures us that God's love is always very personal. He gave us a gift of His Son to make sure we trust and know that.

Jesus is God's gift to the world. But like any gift, it must be received. We can admire the story of Christmas and still not embrace its meaning. We can celebrate the holiday and still not surrender our hearts. Yet the invitation of Christmas is not merely to observe—it is to respond. The shepherds did not stay in the fields. They went to Bethlehem. They saw the child. And then they went and told others what they had seen. Christmas calls us to action. To faith. To worship. To witness.

Christmas calls us to live with humility, generosity, and compassion. Just as Christ came to serve, we are called to serve. Just as Christ came to love, we are called to love. In a world marked by division, Christmas invites us to be reconciled. In a world marked by greed, Christmas invites us to be generous and compassionate. In a world marked by despair, Christmas invites us to hope.

John in his gospel tells us, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Darkness did not overcome Christ then, and it will not overcome Him now. No matter how dark the night feels, the light of Christ still shines. Christmas assures us that evil does not have the final word. Suffering does not have the final word. Death does not have the final word. Hope has a name. And His name is Jesus.

As we celebrate Christmas, may we do more than remember a story. May we encounter a Savior. May we open our hearts and make room for Christ anew. Like Mary, may we say, “Let it be unto me according to Your word.” Like the shepherds, may we go and see—and then tell others. Like the angels, may we give glory to God. Like the wise men, may we offer our lives in worship.

For unto us a child is born.  
Unto us a Son is given.  
And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Jesus the Christ.