

SERMON: "CHRISTMAS PRESENCE, GOD'S PRESENCE"
TEXT: LUKE 2:1-20

December 24, 2024
Christmas Eve

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INTRODUCTION

The seminary student was doing some grocery shopping and asked the cashier for some stamps, for her Christmas cards. "Do you have any Christmas stamps?" she asked. The clerk replied. "No, I'm sorry we don't"

Not one to give up too soon, she asked a follow up question
"What kind of stamps do you have?" The cashier shrugged and said,
"All we have are Liberty Bells and some lady holding a baby." Guess a depiction of Mary holding the Christ child doesn't count as a Christmas stamp

We've added a lot of extras, our own unique traditions that make the holiday special
All that merry making (however good the tidings may be) can get a bit confusing
Amidst all the build up to tomorrow morning we may end up like Charlie Brown
You remember him voicing a question about the meaning of Christmas

When the Christmas pageant rehearsal breaks down and morphs into a dance
(As an aside, I love the music ... and the way they dance)
Charlie Brown cries out in honest frustration and confusion...

*I guess I don't know what Christmas is all about
Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?*

Then Linus speaks up, *Sure, Charlie Brown, I can tell you*
At that point the music stops and there is quiet. Linus asks for light
walks to center stage and with his trusty blanket in hand, tells the story
of Christ's birth from Luke's gospel, including the angel's words
of good news to the shepherds and to us

**Do not be afraid, for behold I bring you good news of a great
joy which will come to all the people, for to you is born this day
in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**

When Linus finishes, he tells Charlie Brown, *"That's what Christmas is all about."*
It is about the birth of a child ... the Christ child
a child who is a gift to us, to all of us, from God
to you, singular and plural, is born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord

A child. A child who would be born not in a palace, but in a manger
A child born not into a family of wealth or power. No, he would be a child
who would have to, with his family, flee from the powerful who resort to violence
violence against children to hold on to their power – Jesus was a refugee

NOTICE THE PATTERN

The child of Christmas who would grow up to be a teacher, a healer,
a man who would befriend the friendless (and create quite the scandal)
A man who showed us how to live and love.
A man who would suffer and die.

This is how God changes the world! This is how God saves the world!
Not a Hollywood script. Not a Hallmark or halls of power script either.
“God works in mysterious ways,” they say

I like the way the editor of the Presbyterian Outlook, Terri McDowell Ott,
talks about seeing God’s mysterious work as a pattern. Her article begins
with a quote from a book where the lead character remembers the words
of her deceased father “Faith is to know the pattern is there,
even when none is visible.”

Then she makes the point that small patterns repeat, like a ripple effect.

Small patterns can initiate large, positive fractal change. This Christmas we celebrate the birth of a baby – one tiny, fragile soul born into a world large with oppression, violence and injustice. Jesus was a singular individual who lived a short life. But he patterned his life on love, compassion and justice. He countered cultural practices and patterns by spending time with tax collectors, foreigners, lepers, women and children. He resisted violence with nonviolence. He modeled an alternative pattern of living to great impact.

Her article ends with her talking about a pattern she notices every year
a Christmas Eve tradition, that touches her. It is my favorite as well
A dark room – only a few lights on (just so the organist can see the keys)
One light, one small light to symbolize Jesus enters into that darkness
Then from that one candle ... others candles are lit. The light spreads

We moved here ten years. From Georgia. We waited until we got here to buy
winter clothes. We knew what they had in Georgia wouldn’t cut it here
People both here and down south still ask me how I have adjusted to the cold
My answer has always been that I don’t mind the cold. I like the snow

My challenge is not the cold ... it is the winter darkness. I not only count down the days
until Christmas, I count down to the winter solstice. There are dark days
and dark seasons (Iowa winters have taught me that). But the darkness
isn’t just about winter weather. We all know dark days and dark seasons

That said. Have you seen the pattern of how God works? You will at the end
of the service on this silent, holy night. The light shines in the darkness
And the light spreads. And the darkness has not ... and will not overcome it.