

Sermon for Christmas Eve

Date: December 24, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 9:2-7

Epistle Reading: Titus 2:11-14

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:1-20

Sermon Text: Luke 2:1-20

Sermon Title: It's About Time!



Hymns:

LSB 379 – Oh Come All Ye Faithful

LSB 380 – Hark the Herald Angels Sing

LSB 366 – It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

LSB 363 – Silent Night, Holy Night

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Creative Worship



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
FaceBook.com/StJohnsAustin
Twitter.com@StJohnsAustinMN
FaceBook.com/Shepherd.James.Groleau
KAUS 1480 AM Sun. 9:00am



Text: Luke 2:1-20

At that time the Emperor Augustus ordered a census of the Roman Empire. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All the people went to register in the cities where their ancestors had lived.

So Joseph went from Nazareth, a city in Galilee, to a Judean city called Bethlehem. Joseph, a descendant of King David, went to Bethlehem because David had been born there. Joseph went there to register with Mary. She had been promised to him in marriage and was pregnant. While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have her child. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

Shepherds were in the fields near Bethlehem. They were taking turns watching their flock during the night. An angel from the Lord suddenly appeared to them. The glory of the Lord filled the area with light, and they were terrified. The angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid! I have good news for you, a message that will fill everyone with joy. Today, in the city of David, your Savior, Christ the Lord, has been born. This is how you will recognize him: You will find an infant wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly, a large army of angels appeared with the first angel. They were praising God by singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on Earth!”

The angels left them and went back to heaven. The shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about.” They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph with the baby, who was lying in a manger. When they saw the child, they repeated what they had been told about him. Everyone who heard the shepherds’ story was amazed. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. As the shepherds returned to their flock, they glorified and praised God for everything they had seen and heard. Everything happened the way the angel had told them.

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May the Prince of Peace, born this night,
fill your hearts and minds,
with the love of God
found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Christmas Eve has a special place in all of our hearts. It is on this night that we celebrate a birthday. Not just anyone's birthday mind you. It is the birth of God's Son, the birth of Jesus Christ. This day has, throughout the ages, been a time of giving and a time of peace.

It was in Belgium. On December 24th, 1914 and the world was at war. On one side of the horrible conflict stood the British and French armies. On the other stood the Germans. As the sun began to go down and the twilight of dusk washed over the landscape the Germans set about decorating their trenches with tannenbaums.¹ Just before night fell the Germans put up a sign. It read:

**YOU NO SHOOT
WE NO SHOOT.**



Not long after the sign went up the Germans began singing Christmas carols. One in particular had a profound meaning, and affect:

Silent night, holy night.
All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant so tender and mild.
Sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Many years have passed since that Christmas Eve in 1914. Few people perhaps even remember that the event occurred, but it did. There on the battlefield, with soldiers ready to kill and die for their country, all became quiet, all became peaceful, because the Prince of Peace was born.

To truly understand what happened in 1914 we need to go further back, a few months further back in history. Back to June 28th, 1914. In the city of Sarajevo. There the archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated as he left the town hall. That one shot caused a series of "domino effect" events which in only a few short months brought the entire world to war.

It was called the "Great War" "The war to end all wars." Never in the history of the world had so much fighting happened at one time. Never had such loss of life

1 Evergreen branches used particularly at Christmas time.

occurred since the Great Flood of Noah's time. That one shot led to millions losing their lives.

This so called "Great War" cost many lives, but there is another war that has cost far more, and has been going on far longer than World War I lasted. In fact every human being born since Adam has been part of it. There in the garden, Satan fired one shot. That one shot destroyed Eden, and all life on Earth has endured the affects of it ever since. That one shot has cost every human being their life.²

The result of that one shot brought the entire human race to war. War with each other, but even worse war with God. You, right now, because you are alive and were born, are at war with God. We are born His enemy.³ In World War I three out of every four soldiers died. The odds of survival were slim at best. In the War with God however your odds are a bit worse. In this war everyone dies. No one lives. No one survives. No one escapes. It is hopeless. There is nothing we can do to escape the coming wrath of God. God's anger has been kindled and we are the focus of that contempt.

As World War I raged on into December each side sustained very serious and heavy losses. The hate and contempt on both sides grew with vicious fervor. Both sides wished for nothing but death on his enemy... and then it happened. On December 24th, Christmas Eve, a special kind of miracle took place. The soldiers, the rank and file, did what the upper echelon of authority could not do. They called a truce. There in Belgium with only six words the "Christmas Truce" was made.

**YOU NO SHOOT
WE NO SHOOT.**

The sound of gunfire was replaced with the singing of Christmas carols which filled the night, perhaps not entirely unlike the armies of Heaven once filled the night air over fields near Bethlehem, where shepherd were keeping watch over their flocks by night.⁴ The day before soldiers tried to sleep with bullets whizzing over their heads. On this night the words were sung:

Sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Who but God could have affected such change in the hearts of hate-filled people? Who but God can change hearts now? We all deal with 'pet sins.' Those things that constantly poison our hearts and plague our minds keeping the hate alive. There are those things we just don't really want to let go. There are those

2 **Romans 6:23** – ... the wages of sin is death,...

3 **Psalm 51:5** – Indeed, I was born guilty. I was a sinner when my mother conceived me.

4 **Luke 2:8** – Shepherds were in the fields near Bethlehem. They were taking turns watching their flock during the night.

people we just don't really want to love. There are those people we just really enjoy hating. Can you change yourself? Can you stop the poison from coursing from your heart through your veins and out your mouth? Can you heal yourself? If you are genuinely, truly, grossly, bluntly, honest with yourself, do you want to be healed from those things?

You know the answer. It's 'No.' Why?

Why does sin feel so good in our hearts and minds? Why is it that we can't come to that place where we lust for God's perfection, instead of Satan's poison? It is because sin separates us from God. It pulls us away. It drags us into the pit. A pit filled with the stench of rot and filth. Which is why our Savior came to us in that pit, as a baby, born and laid in a manger filled with the stench of rot and filth. With Him He brought peace, forgiveness, salvation and the cure to all sin.

Listen again to those awesome and powerful words:

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on Earth."⁵

Those angels, filled with awe at the fulfillment of God's promise to save His people, could not contain themselves. They filled the skies and cried out to the world:

"Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!"

Two nights: one about 110 years ago, the other about 2,000 years ago. In both, wars raged. In both, God was glorified. When Jesus was born on that first Christmas, the glory was given to God as the angels, the soldiers of Heaven, sang His praise. Many years later soldiers again gave glory to God in spite of the stain of sin that plagues every aspect of their very existence. Both nights remind us of

5 Luke 2:9-14 (*Paraphrase*)

the true Miracle of Christmas. It was in both of these nights that Christ, the Messiah of God, brought peace to Earth.

Now the Christmas Truce did not last. The truth is in most places it endured for only one day. That is where the events of these two night diverge. Because although the peace found in 1914 could not endure the peace given by the Prince of Peace has, and will continue to endure forever. That peace, true peace, was given to you, as a cure, an antidote, for the poison in your heart, the poison churning in your veins. Jesus came for you, for that reason, to cure you and make you whole.⁶

That is the Miracle of Christmas. That is why we come here every Sunday and sing praises to God. That is why we come here obeying His command to worship together. Every Sunday is in fact a celebration of that Miracle of Christmas, as much as it is also a celebration of the Easter resurrection. That is precisely what the Church is for, what the Church should be about.



Because without the birth of Jesus He could not have died. Without the death of Jesus He could not have risen. Without the resurrection of Jesus you could not be saved, you could not have peace.

The Christmas Truce of 1914 has never been repeated. Sadly there have been many wars since that ‘War to End all Wars.’ Never has peace fallen on a battle field like it did that day. However, the peace that came on that first Christmas is repeated. It is repeated here every Sunday morning. It is repeated every time a child is baptized, every time one of God’s children returns to the church he once abandoned, every time a soul confesses to God and longs to be restored to the place where God smiles on them.

This evening, look into that manger. Look hard, look long, because there, in the face of a little baby, you will see what you could never find anywhere else this side of Heaven’s gates. There you see the face of God... and He is smiling.

Smiling because He recognizes you. You are special to Him. You are the reason He is here. He, on that:

Silent night, that holy night,
the Son of God,
love’s pure light,
with radiant beams from His holy face,
and with the dawn of redeeming grace,

6 Matthew 9:10-13 – (When you read this text remember that tax collectors were traitors and thieves. They were aiding the enemy, Rome, and stealing from their own people by over taxing them and keeping the profits.)

is Jesus. Lord at His birth.

Praise be to Him, Jesus, Lord at Thy birth.

Amen.

