

Rev. Lynne Ogren  
December 24, 2018

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
Christmas Eve      Luke 2:1-20

In the name of Jesus who is the grace of God and the salvation of all. Amen      (Titus 2:11)

My grandmother used to tell a story of one of my earliest Christmases. I was old enough to talk but not yet old enough to understand what this Christmas business was all about. As we sat around the living room with the presents under the tree, each time I was handed a gift to open I would open my eyes wide and say, “For me?!” That expression on my face and in my voice delighted my grandma.

On the other side of gifting is deciding what to give. I want to give gifts that people will like, something they can use, or something that took some time or attention so that they will know that I think highly of them. But often times I find that my friends and family are much like my toddler-aged self in the delight we share in receiving something that is just for us, no matter what is found beneath the ribbons and bows.

“For you.” These are the words we sometimes miss in this all too familiar story of Jesus’ birth. They are hidden, much like Mary & Joseph and baby Jesus were hidden in a stable; hidden from the view of the powerful named at the beginning of tonight’s gospel reading; hidden from the attention of the world around them. But not hidden from God. These two words, “for you”, are perhaps the most important of the words proclaimed by the angels.

The translation we read tonight even hides this exact phrase a bit when the angels declare to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

Rather than “to you is born” we could also say, “for you.” Today, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord, is born for you. He is the one promised by the prophet Isaiah who declared, “For a child has been born *for us*, a son given to us;”<sup>1</sup> for you individually, and for you, the people of God, and for all people—yes, the child has been born even for the emperor and the governor, and for the townspeople who wouldn’t give Joseph and Mary a second glance as they all tried to find a place to stay in Bethlehem that night.

God has given a gift *to us* that is *for us*. It is wrapped not with ribbons and shiny paper, but in bands of cloth. Humanity continues to be surprised not only that God would give the gift of his Son but that he would come in the surprising package of a poor, and basically homeless, baby. The shepherds were surprised that the angel came to them, the outcast and the ignored. In this amazing news of the birth of a savior, these ordinary shepherds learned that this gift was for them, too.

Later on, the magi who came to worship Jesus, the King of the Jews, would include people of power in their invitation to visit this amazing gift to the world, but that invitation would be rejected by King Herod.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 9:6a

And those of us who hear this good news year after year, we are still in awe that this gift is really for me, for you, for us. The angel said this birth is good news of great joy for *all the people*, for those who hold power and for those who don't; for those we hold dear and for the ones we struggle to love; and it is especially good news for the ones we have a hard time seeing, who by choice or by circumstance are hidden from our attention.

Jesus Christ came to the world as a gift from God, *for you*. In the meal we will share tonight, you will hear those words again when Jesus says to us, "This is my body, given *for you*. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed *for you* and *for all people* for the forgiveness of sin."

Soon we will sing the carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." In the third verse we will sing, "How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given. So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven. No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in."

In our worship tonight, we receive the gift that is Jesus, given *for us*. May our surprise become delight, and may our delight grow to joy as we join with the shepherds in glorifying and praising God in the telling of this good news that is for you and for all people.

Thanks be to God!

Amen