

Christmas 2020, 7:00pm Streamed Service
Rev. Adam T. Trambley
Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-20
December 24, 2020, St. John's Sharon

I think sometimes we mix up Jesus and Santa Claus. I'm not talking here about the ways that Jolly Ole St. Nick doll sometimes turns up in a family nativity scene, or how the time we spend formulating our Christmas lists to mail to the North Pole filled with what we want can be more than the time we spend on our knees supplicating the throne of grace for what we really need. No, I'm talking about how we have created an elaborate understanding of how Santa Claus manages to come and visit each and every household on Christmas eve and yet we feel like Jesus is just lying in a manger somewhere, probably sleeping, waiting for us to show up to him.

Think about it. I was watching some Christmas movie a few days ago, and they had clearly taken great pains to show how Santa could get down even the narrowest of chimneys, how he magically created temporary chimneys for the children who didn't have one, and posited a variety of relativistic space-time distortions to ensure that Father Christmas could fit every home on his one-night delivery schedule. And we all basically buy it as more or less plausible. Yet, with Jesus, we want to get all bundled up and go places. For it to be really Christmas we've got to be at Church, we've got to be at the houses of family members, maybe we have to be at Kraynak's Christmasland. Somehow we don't think that the most important encounter we will have at Christmas is really going to occur if we sit at home and look for Jesus to come to us. We tell our children to go to bed and wait for Santa, but we don't really tell ourselves to lie in bed and pray and listen for God.

I know this isn't the usual Church Christmas advertisement. Usually, we all get caught up in everything – here are all the services and the pageants and everything else you can do. And they are all good and beautiful and gifts to us in those years when we can experience them. But Psalm 63 says to us : *My mouth praises you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the night watches.* Imagine going to bed tonight with the same sense of joy about the coming of Jesus, the same excitement just thinking about who Jesus is and stories we know about Jesus, and the amazing times we have encountered people who represent him in our lives, imagine going to bed tonight with Jesus on our hearts the same way as a child longing for that new game or toy goes to bed thinking about Santa. Because if we do, we are not going to wake up disappointed.

That's the good news on this isolated, distanced Christmas. That even though I am here and you are not physically here in the same way, That even though I can't see all the people I love that I would normally see this year, That even though we are beset by disease and darkness and insecurity and fear, That in the midst of all of everything 2020 has thrown at us, the Light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

We cannot really be isolated anymore because the Son of God came down to earth to reconcile us back to God and to reconcile us to each other. Think about what Christmas means. Human beings turned away from God, and were distanced in every way for the source of life. We left the garden, told God to get lost so we could do what we wanted, and made ourselves totally

unworthy to be in his heavenly presence. We were mired in death far away from the God of life. That situation was horrible for us, but we were stuck. So God decided to do something about it. God loved us so much that he sent his Son so that we might have eternal life, as well. The gyrations required to ensure that Jesus could end up in that stable in Bethlehem were far beyond anything a Santa movie has yet to devise.

The preparations that fill our Advent readings are just the beginning. The angel appearing to Mary to tell her that even not knowing man she will become the mother of the Son of God, and then the angel coming in a dream to Joseph to tell him that everything is OK. The Roman census so that these residents of Nazareth make it to Bethlehem where the Messiah is prophesized to be born. Dreams to wise men ensuring they go home by a route that won't lead evil King Herod to directly Jesus' manger, and then the holy family fleeing into Egypt.

Yet that is nothing compared to how Jesus was in the form of God but did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, and emptied himself for us. How Jesus went from the glory of the perfect, immortal, heavenly existence to take on this mortal flesh. How the King of Kings was willing to become a vulnerable human child, dependent on his mother for nourishment, and exposed to scraped knees, colds, and all the other pains of human existence, up to and including crucifixion and death. How Jesus took the largest barrier in the entire cosmos, the barrier that sin and death erected between us and God, and broke through it so that it could never separate us from God again. That is how much God did to make sure that humanity could experience the presence of Jesus on that first Christmas.

God will do no less to ensure that each and every one of us who opens our hearts to him experiences the presence of Jesus this Christmas. COVID can't keep Jesus away. Social and physical distancing can't keep Jesus away. A spotty internet connection or odd streaming issues or whatever else is somehow in between wherever you are tonight and St. John's sanctuary – none of it can keep Jesus away from you. We do miss you. We long to be together for so many holy and blessed reasons, and I look forward to the day when we are together again with songs and hugs and donuts. In the meantime, Jesus will still bring us his peace, and his joy, and his love, especially this Christmas when we are desperately yearning for his presence.

I assume that Santa can find a way to visit you tonight. But I know that the God who already moved heaven and earth to ensure his Son was born in manger two thousand years ago is more than able to do whatever is necessary for Jesus to come and be present with you wherever you are this night. The unstoppable presence and love of the Son of God coming to us is the true miracle of this, and every Christmas.