

Westminster Presbyterian Church
Vero Beach, Florida 32966
Rev. Dr. Les Koerselman
December 24, 2009

Psalm 96

Micah 5:1-4

Matthew 1:18-25

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet; ‘Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Immanuel’ (which means, God with us). When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.”

“Immanuel - God with Us”

Dear friends in Christ and those who would be. An old soldier and former battlefield comrade approached the Roman Emperor Augustus. The man was involved in a lawsuit that was turning out badly for him and he asked Augustus for a favor. He appealed to the Emperor to appear in court on his behalf. Augustus was too busy and he asked a staff member to speak on his behalf. The old man was insulted. He rolled back his sleeves to reveal the scars he had earned in war and then he shouted at Augustus, “When you were in danger at the battlefield of Actium, I didn’t send a substitute! I fought for you myself!” The Emperor Augustus decided to appear in court himself.

God did not send a substitute. God himself came to us. That is precisely what it means - Immanuel - God with us.

Our meditation is taken from the gospel according to St. Matthew 1:23, “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Immanuel (which means, God with us).”

A.W. Tozer writes, "Religion today is not transforming the people." Anyone who takes even a casual look at our world today would have to say, "That is absolutely true." He said, "It is being transformed by the people. Religion is not raising the moral levels of society; it is descending to society's own level and congratulating itself that it has scored a victory because society is smilingly accepting its surrender." We know this to be true.

Visit our stores and you will notice how we have commingled fact and fiction, truth and myth. We see displays of Santa and reindeer and next to Rudolph, a crèche: Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus. In piped music we hear "Hark the herald angels sing, Glory to the new born King," and then we hear the upbeat pulsating rhythm of "Here comes Santa Claus, Here comes Santa Claus."

Our Christmas greetings in some way tell the same story. They speak of happy holidays, good health and Christmas cheer. Somehow, we've lost or we have forgotten that the message of Christmas is that a Savior has been born.

I like what a black church in Kansas City has as its mission statement. Listen to it. "Wake up, sing up, pray up, stay up, and never give up nor shut up until the cause of Christ in this church and in this world is built up." We could learn something from that, couldn't we?

One little girl in the excitement of Christmas seemed to be always in the way. Mother was baking those wonderful Christmas cookies in the kitchen. The little girl tried to help but what did she do - she spilled the batter. Her mother said, "Why don't you go help Dad in the living room?" She does so but not in the way intended. She tried to help but in the process broke three of the most beautiful ornaments. In exasperation the father said, "Darling, let us prepare - you watch." Later that evening as she knelt for her prayers she said, "Lord, forgive us our Christmases as we forgive those who Christmas against us." Sometimes at Christmas we need more forgiveness than at any other time of the year.

I want you to realize tonight that the living God knows your needs. He knows you as you truly are. He knows the condition of your hearts. Within each of you here gathered tonight, there is a deep and abiding unanswerable need. We desire, amidst the confusion of our world, to know and understand with full assurance God's love for each of us. Do you realize that ever since the Garden of Eden, generation after generation has been longing for paradise lost? O to live in full communion with God and to know Jesus in all of his fullness. "O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel."

Some years ago in New York City an impoverished Latino couple was to be blessed with a little baby. Labor pains began, they dashed to the hospital and the mother was immediately taken into the delivery room. The doctor came out after several moments and said, "There are some complications. Pray if you can." He reentered the delivery room. After an hour he came to see the young man and said, "I'm sorry, I did everything I could to save your little baby boy, but he died." That young man speaking very poor broken English said, "I recently heard of a medical procedure whereby the corneas of even an infant child can be taken, removed and sight be given to another. Is this possible doctor?" The doctor said, "Yes, it surely is." He said, "Go, give sight unto others." A father who was disabled because of his blindness was able to return to work and provide for his family. A young mother who had been blinded in a car accident was able to see the beauty of her children grow and mature. The gift of sight from that little baby to another is precisely what Scripture says happened in the birth of Jesus, "And they that walked in darkness have seen a great light." Suddenly God was coming to us in ways that we could understand.

Listen to the words of prophecy as they are found in the Old Testament and they find the fulfillment in the birth of Jesus. "The God of creation is also the author of our salvation." Never forget that. Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; and he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." The fulfillment of that prophecy is in Galatians 4:4, "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law." From Genesis 49:10, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." From the great prophet Isaiah 9:7, "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it." And for us Luke 1:32, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." Again from Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

We can be eternally grateful to this character called Matthew. A man, who left his tax tables, and left behind his old life in order to discover the riches of his Savior Jesus. Corruption and ill-gotten gain were placed behind him but Matthew took with him something very important. He took with him his pen and the Holy Spirit inspired him to write. What a message he wrote for us! Matthew wrote of the creative power of the Spirit of God and of salvation visiting human kind.

In Jewish thought, the Spirit of God brought truth to mankind. The Holy Spirit taught the prophets what to say and their message was that a Savior was coming. They believed the Holy Spirit enabled men to recognize the truth, as do we. The Holy Spirit shall lead you into all truth. When Jesus comes into our hearts, he opens our eyes and we see life anew. The Jewish people of that day connected the creative spirit of God with power. The Hebrew word was "ruah", the Greek word "pneuma", mean breath or spirit. From Job 33:4, "The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." In other words, out of chaos, creation was ordered. They also believed in the re-creative power of the Holy Spirit as do we. Do we not herald and trumpet the words of St. Paul, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold all things are become new." From Ezekiel the 37th chapter we read of the story of the valley of dry bones and we hear God speaking to Ezekiel, "I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live." The rabbis had a wonderful saying that God said to Israel, "In this world my Spirit has put wisdom in you, but in the future, my Spirit will make you live again." Matthew's account tells us of the Spirit of the Living God operative as never before. Matthew says, "Jesus is the fulfillment of all prophecy for indeed it is God with us."

Many years ago a couple in Germany were preparing for their evening meal. It was the dead of winter and suddenly there was a knock at the door. Upon answering the door they found an ill-clad youth asking for food. The couple graciously took him and offered him food and shelter. They were Christians and that night they prayed together and asked God for direction in this young man's life. Somehow they both felt that God was leading them, not only to take this young lad in, but also to adopt him and care for him. This they did. Little did they know who this stranger was and what he would accomplish. For you see the spirit of the Living God moved not only in their hearts in order to adopt that child, but also the Spirit of the Living God began to move in a mighty way in that little boy's heart. He was to grow, become a man and literally change the course of history. His name was Martin Luther.

That's what God does with people and that's what the Christmas message really is all about - GOD ENTERING INTO US IN A REAL, DYNAMIC, POSITIVE, JOY-FILLED WAY. It is his Spirit breathing new life into us. The same spirit that gave birth to our Savior is the Spirit that will give birth to us in a new and dynamic way this Christmas time.

I close with the poem of James Dillon.

Not to the priest in the temple of old.
Not to the king in his palace of gold.
Not to the famous, the men of the hour.
Not to the great, with their might and their power.

But to shepherds alone in the night,
God sent his glorious angels of light.
Bearing their tidings so blessed and true,
Fear not, a Savior is born unto you.

Not to the men who in arrogant pride,
March ever on over life's surging tide.
Not to the boastful who make their life's aim,
Only to seek after worldly acclaim.

But to the humble, the meek, and the low,
When in the night of great trial and woe,
God sends his Spirit to whisper a new.
Fear not, your Savior abideth with you.

Immanuel - God with us!!

Let us pray:

Gracious Father, as we now celebrate this sacred feast, grant that your Spirit might move in and through us. Give to each one of us a new found conviction, a deeper awareness of your presence, a more joyous faith and abundant life. For it is in the name of Jesus that we ask it. Amen.