

"Places of Advent: The Manger"
Luke 2:1-14

December 9, 2015

2nd Advent Service

People today are scared today. Terrorists are killing people in France, California, and other places. Policemen are killing people in city streets and gaining lots of attention. More and more people are buying guns to protect themselves and kill the criminals before they kill us. Many people are wondering, "Where is God?" People killing. Where is God? People dying. Where is God? Evil winning. Where is God? People are tired of saying again and again, "My thoughts and prayers go out to the family and friends of people who died." Some in the media said people should stop saying that. One New York newspaper boldly proclaimed, "God is not fixing this." Where IS God?

You want to know where God is? I'll show you where God is. (*Get manger from nativity set.*) Here is God. That's what the angel told the shepherds, "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*." Here is the Lord God who created the heavens and the earth – wrapped up in human flesh, wrapped up in swaddling cloths, and lying in a manger – a wooden box filled with straw feeding animals.

That's not how we picture someone who could fight against evil and defeat it. We think of a wealthy merchant, a mighty warrior, or a strong king. The Lord God came to earth as none of those. Instead, He comes as a tiny baby. People might think this is a story about the Savior's humble beginnings. Surely, He would grow up and become a wealthy merchant or a mighty warrior or a strong king and use His power to overcome evil by force.

That's not true, either. Really? Doesn't God have all power? Many people say, "You can't put God in a box", meaning you can't limit God's power. But on Christmas, God put Himself in a box literally (true) in a manger and figuratively (means), by voluntarily limiting what He would do. God the Son, Jesus, humbled Himself, first, by becoming a human being (man) and, secondly, by restricting the use of His power, to follow God the Father's plan to defeat evil and rescue mankind.

What did God the Father's plan require? A perfect and complete sacrifice for the sin of all people was needed. A human being would have to die. So, God the Son did become a man like us in every way but without sin. Jesus would be born on Christmas and would live like us – eating, drinking, becoming tired, and sleeping. Jesus would suffer the effects of sin, beginning on Christmas night when He would have to sleep in that manger. We have an unrealistic view of that. Sleeping in a manger was not cute and comfortable, but hard and difficult. The stable was cold. The straw was probably rough and uncomfortable. Jesus began suffering on the first night He was born.

As He grew up, Jesus did not have an easy life. He did not become wealthy. In fact, He had nothing. Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Luke 9:58) He did not become a mighty warrior, but a rabbi. When someone called Him a King, the religious authorities arrested Him, judged Him guilty of death, and pressured Pilate to crucify Him.

This bothers our Christmas celebration. God in a baby lying in the wooden manger is cute. God in a man hanging on a cross is not cute. But it is necessary. Even some of our Christmas hymns recognize that. Verse two from "*What Child Is This?*" describes Baby Jesus' rough situation and says it will get worse, "Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, the cross be borne for me for you." The cross is necessary to defeat evil. Evil happens because of sin. Jesus' death on the cross takes away sin and overcomes the power of the Evil One. As Jesus died, He said, "It is finished!" The guilt of sin was finished. The power of sin was finished. Satan's reign was finished. The power of evil was finished.

But you say our world does not look that way. Evil seems to be winning. But looks can be deceiving! Two days ago, our nation looked back on our worst military defeat – PEARL HARBOR. If you talked to people on December 8, 1941 and asked them who would win the war, most people would probably say Japan. But who DID win the war? The United States finally won.

Jesus' resurrection means God has won the war. He has defeated sin, has defeated evil, has defeated death, has defeated death, and has defeated hell. It doesn't look like that way now, but God

HAS won and we, trusting in God in the wooden manger and God on the wooden cross, will one day share that victory and experience eternal joy because of it.

But what do we do until we actually see that victory? God comes to us again. God the Son, Jesus, comes in a humble way, like a manger and a cross. Jesus comes to us with bread and wine. On the night before He died, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, saying, "Take, eat; this is My Body given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." He took the cup, gave thanks, and said, "Take, drink; this is My blood of the new testament, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me."

Our altar becomes like the manger and like the cross – holding the body and blood of Jesus. The shepherds knelt before the manger. We kneel before the altar. Jesus gives up His life on the cross. Jesus gives us life through the forgiveness of our sins from the altar. We eat His body and drink His blood in faith and that gives us comfort as we live our lives now.

This also gives us hope for the future. When the war is over and sin is gone, evil is gone, death is gone, and Satan is gone, there will be one huge celebration, one great banquet in heaven. This meal on our altar is a taste of that future banquet. Every time you eat the bread and drink the cup, you are receiving Jesus and you are proclaiming Jesus' death until He comes again. When we are here, we can endure the evil because we know the victory will be revealed.

If anyone wants to know where God is, we know where God is. HE is in the wooden manger, born for us. He is on the wooden cross, dying for us and rising again. HE is with the bread and wine on the altar, giving us forgiveness, life, hope and salvation. During Advent, we wait in joyful anticipation (eager) for God to come again to claim His victory over evil. Despite all the evil in the world, God will fix everything. He will fix us and bring us to everlasting life with Him! Thanks be to God for that! Amen