

Christmas Eve 2020, Cornerstone

Luke 1:26-38

By Rev. Bernie Michaud

This is how it all began. God sent an angel to a young virgin, Mary. The word angel just means messenger. Someone sent to relay a message. But, this was no ordinary message and this was no ordinary messenger. The message was that God was going to send His Son to earth to save mankind. And, this messenger was one of God's chief servants; a heavenly being.

The messenger, Gabriel, told Mary that she was highly favored and that God was with her. Mary was troubled and somewhat afraid just as all of us would be. But, the angel said, "don't be afraid, you have found favor with God." Mary had found favor with God. God was going to use her in a very special way. She would become the mother of Jesus, who would be the savior of the world.

Mary would have the honor of having the son of God, who is God Himself, living inside of her. Mary would forever be called the most blessed of all women.

For us, looking back at all of this, it's easy for us to see that this was really special. How would you feel if you were chosen like Mary to have God Himself living inside of you?

Well, the part about Christmas that is so exciting is that you too have found favor with God. God didn't just find favor with Mary; God didn't just come for Mary. God found favor with you; He came for you too. God's plan was to send Jesus to earth with the purpose of saving you.

John 3:16 says, for God so love the world that He gave His only son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

I'm not a messenger from heaven like Gabriel but I am here to tell you that you have found favor with God. This same Jesus, who was born to be the savior of the world, was born to be your savior. In the same way as an angel told Mary that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her. I am telling you that if you accept this Jesus as your savior, the Holy Spirit of the most high will come upon you too. And, like Mary, you will be most blessed.

Mary's response to the angel was, "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said." What is your response to Jesus? Will, you also say, "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said?"

What would have happened if Mary had said, "No, I don't want any part of all of this?" Well, I don't think that Mary had a choice in the matter. And, God knew what Mary's response would be. God knew that Mary's heart toward Him was pure. And that she would do a good job of raising His son.

Unlike Mary, we do have a choice, we can chose to take part in what God is doing, or refuse to. Many people who reject Jesus as their savior still celebrate Christmas. But, it's not the same. Mary had God inside of her and that made a big difference. You can also have God's Holy Spirit overshadow you.

Right now, tonight, you can say, like Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant; may it be to me as you have said?" We celebrate Christmas because we, as people, have, just like Mary, found favor with God.

Luke 2:14 says, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Merry Christmas; and may God bless you all!

Luke 2:1-21

The Impoverished Peacemaker Christmas Eve 2020

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Last fall I bought my son his first Little People Nativity Set. The set has these little plastic people, a camel, a sheep, a cow, the wisemen, no shepherds (I don't know why), an angel, Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus in a straw-filled manger. If you press a button on top, the star lights up and it plays *Away in the Manger*.

Away in a manger
No crib for His bed
The little Lord Jesus
Lay down His sweet head

The stars in the sky
Look down where He lay
The little Lord Jesus
Asleep on the hay

I love nativity sets that help us imagine the birth of Jesus, and I love *Away in the Manger*. They help teach us what happened at that first Christmas, but they don't really tell us what it all means. I want to know what it all means. The nativity story tells us that...

God came into the world.

There was this Old Testament prophet named Micah who lived seven-hundred years before the birth of Jesus. He prophesied that one day a king is going to come out of the little town of Bethlehem whose coming is from old, from ancient days.

Micah 5:2 (ESV)
But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
 who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
 from ancient days.

So here we find a mystery. A human ruler is going to be born in Bethlehem, but the ruler is actually God himself, the "Ancient of Days." (Dan 7:13-14) God will enter into the world through the birth of a child.

Did any of you ever see the Dr. Seuss Christmas movie, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*? It's a story about the Grinch attempting to steal Christmas from the Whos at Whoville. The Grinch is thwarted by a little girl, Cindy-Lou Who showing him love. Did you know the director Ron Howard actually made a cameo in the movie? There's a scene where the Grinch yells a joke while he's driving the sleigh. That joke was made at Ron Howard. The director not only created the story, he entered into the story, which is what God has done for us. At Christmas, God entered into our story through the birth of his Son, Jesus Christ.

You would think that if God were going to be born in the world, he would be born in a palace in the best hospital. But that's not how it happened.

God came into the world impoverished and powerless.

Instead of being born in the Emperor's palace, he was born to two poor parents, Joseph and Mary. I bet they had had a pretty tough year. They were ordered by Caesar Augustus, a political ruler who didn't know them, to travel from Galilee to Bethlehem, 90 miles. And oh, Mary is 9-months pregnant. All the nice nativity stories show Mary riding a donkey, but we don't know that. She might have walked the entire way. It wasn't a stay-at-home order. It was a leave-your-home order. To top it off, when they finally made it to Bethlehem, there wasn't any room for them in the inn, and Mary's starting to feel contractions. God knows what it's like to step down into a bad situation. He knows what you're going through, and he can turn it around for good.

Mary gave birth to Jesus in a stable full of animals. Probably smelled like hay, and manure, and the animals were probably kind of noisy. They wrapped Jesus in swaddling cloths and laid him in a feeding manger. God wasn't born at Brigham & Women's or Mass General. God choose to be born in tent city under the bridge, or in a Super 8 motel by the freeway, or at the local community shelter. Prince William and his wife Cate gave birth to Prince George in the Lindo Wing of St. Mary's Hospital in London. Joseph and Mary gave birth to Jesus in the husbandry wing of a farm. Why would God do that? So we would ponder it and understand what type of child this would be.

God came into the world impoverished and powerless so that we might ponder his purposes.

When Mary heard the story of the Angels visiting the shepherds to announce the birth of Christ, it says she "pondered" these things in her heart (Luke 1:19). She thought about everything that God was doing, and that's what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to wonder why in the world God would choose to step down into the world the way he did.

God came to Mary and Joseph. They weren't kings and queens, but ordinary people leading hard lives, but who loved God. Why'd my son's nativity forget the shepherds? The first people to hear the news weren't kings, but shepherds, men who slept out in the cold and nobody trusted. God cares about the poor, homeless, those society looks differently upon. Maybe that's not your life. God has come for anyone who realize they need him. If your heart is two-times too small, God can change your heart. He has come for the grinch.

God came into the world impoverished and powerless so that we might ponder his peacemaking purposes.

The angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" God came to give you peace. Will you receive it? Peace with yourself and peace with others starts with making peace with God. God entered into our pain and trouble to rescue us.

It took Jim Carrey three hours every day to put the green Grinch suit on. He had to wear these big-yellow contact lenses that must have felt like sawdust in his eyes. It was so painful it made him act like, well, a grinch. Jim Carrey suffered so much the director Ron Howard hired a CIA agent specializing in pain tolerance to teach him how to endure. But that's not all he did. One day Ron Howard showed up early for work so he could put on the Grinch suit himself. As Director, he not only entered into Whoville, he bore the Grinch's pain upon himself. That's what God has done. At the birth of Jesus, God took on human flesh and entered into our world, entering into our pain, our brokenness, so that he might heal us. Through Jesus, God

can bear your pain. 2020 is too big for us, too big for any of us. Jesus can bear it. Will you give him all your disappointments and pains from this past year? He'd love to give you hope and eternal life in its place.

Whatever you're going through, God understands. He not only understands, but he can make all things new. Will you receive him? He came to give you peace with God. If you're a Grinch, will you let him grow your heart three sizes through receiving his love? *God came into the world impoverished and powerless so that we might ponder his peacemaking purposes.*

May you ponder like Mary, obey like Joseph, praise God like the angels, make haste like the shepherds, and receive the peace of the Christ child this Christmas season, now and forevermore. Amen. (adapted [Christmas benediction](#))

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references. You can also listen on [Apple podcasts](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean for God to come into the world? What is the incarnation?
2. Do you feel like a Grinch this Christmas? Why? How can God relate?
3. Why would God come impoverished and powerless? What does it say about his character?
4. What does it mean for God to make peace with us?
5. How can you have peace with God through Jesus Christ?

Further Reading

Keller, Timothy. *Hidden Christmas: The Surprising Truth Behind the Birth of Christ*. New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 105. Kindle.