

Sermon – Luke 2:1-20  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
Christmas Eve – Year C  
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“Normal No More”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. I thought things would be back to normal by now, that one COVID Christmas would be all we'd get. It's true that we're not in the same place we were last year. For one thing, some of us are actually in this place, which wasn't the case a year ago. (But whether you're here in this room or here with us online), our lives aren't back to normal. Case counts rage, masks are still a regular feature on our faces, and we all continue to make difficult choices about the places we go and the people with whom we spend time. Like you, I yearn for this to be over so that we can get back to normal.
2. On this night, however, as we keep watch with the shepherds and await glad tidings, perhaps it's worth pondering that normal may be entirely overrated. After all, the world was hardly perfect prior to COVID and, were this virus to be eliminated tomorrow, other problems would emerge. As in Isaiah's day, people are burdened with heavy yokes, bowed down and oppressed. We bring our own fear and grief with us here tonight. We live in a world where violence and hate, polarization and mistrust, are normalized. Sin, suffering, and death are so normal that we sometimes don't even notice them, until they come calling in our lives. Why would we want to get back to normal?
3. Reading again through Luke's telling of the nativity of Jesus Christ, I'm struck in a new way by just how normal it is. To be sure, the lead up to the birth is

anything but normal. From angelic annunciations and joyous visitations to songs proclaiming the salvation of God and the beginning of a new age, it is evident that the child to be born is anything but normal. And the angel songs that follow are certainly extraordinary. But the birth itself is straightforward, entirely human. Listen: Mary “gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth.” This could be the story of any child born anywhere. Jesus, Luke wants us to know, is born normally into our not-so-great normal world. Born to first-time parents, unsure and anxious. Born under the thumb of Caesar Augustus, the self-styled son of god who cared for people only in terms of how much he could terrorize them, how much he could wring out of them. Born into a world that had no room for him from the start. Born into a world of sin, suffering, and death, just like you and me.

4. God’s story of salvation and redemption must begin in the normal, for it is the normal itself that must be transcended and transformed. The mystery of the Incarnation is not simply that God would take on human flesh, but that he would do so in such a lowly manner. Here we see the grace of God in its fullness, reaching down and appearing within the heart of human need. And who are the first to hear of his birth? Simple shepherds, keeping watch over their flocks by night. To them in the long watches of the night does the heavenly host appear, announcing to them that this child, ordinarily born, is Savior, Messiah, Lord. That in him we finally have a reason to hope; in him will the great joy of salvation appear. That through Jesus will come not a return to normal but the dawning of a new world in which sin, suffering, and death are vanquished in the victory this child will win as our crucified and risen Lord.
5. The other day, I was working in my office at home while the boys played Monopoly in the basement. The floors of our house are not, shall we say, effective sound barriers, so I was able, or perhaps forced, to follow along. At one point, their friendly banter devolved into a yelling match over differing

- interpretations of the rules. This is part of our normal. I let them go for a while, hoping they'd resolve their disagreement or that one of them would embrace a spirit of magnanimity. My hopes were disappointed. The time came for me to go down there and sort things out. I had to get involved.
6. Christmas is the story of the God who would no longer leave us to our own devices or leave us in the messy normal we'd created. Observing the darkness of our days, the pain we inflict upon one another, our petty disagreements and deep divides, our fears and our griefs, God simply had to get involved. Why? Because the nature of God is love, and love cannot long remain at a distance.
  7. So, God comes down. Takes on flesh. Becomes one of us, one with us, the Holy One who is here for us. Not as one born to power or position, but to an unwed teenage mother. One visited by plain-old shepherds and foreigners following a star. God in Christ enters this world save us from it and from ourselves. God comes down to lift us up, into joy and peace, into life abundant and everlasting. God comes down to save.
  8. Perhaps as we leave worship tonight and wake tomorrow to the joy of Christmas morning, we will commit to taking seriously God's call to overturn the normal. To help others cast off their heavy yokes and exchange them for the light yoke of the Savior. To lift up and unburden the oppressed and downtrodden. To live with goodwill to all. To work to make peace on earth more than a dream.
  9. But first, let us look upon this One born to us. Martin Luther invites us to look upon Jesus and see that now "is come over the power of sin, death, hell, conscience, and guilt, if you come to judge this gurgling Babe and believe that he is come, not to judge you, but to save." So, friends, tonight let us watch with the shepherds, sing with the angels, and ponder with Mary. For Christ is

born. God is here. Nothing, thank God, will be normal ever again. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. Come, now, and worship the newborn King. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.