

Sermon – Luke 2:1-20
David R. Lyle
Grace Lutheran Church
Christmas Eve – Year A
24 December 2022

“A Voice in the Darkness”

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. Christmas begins in the darkness, at least at my home. My children, who still value presents more than sleeping until a reasonable time, will roust their mother and me from bed early tomorrow morning. And Christmas begins in the darkness here at Grace, too. My favorite moment of the year is 4:14pm on Christmas Eve, when the lights in this room go out. In the darkness, school children carry candles. In the darkness, they take their places, preparing to form the cross. In the darkness, one child, brave and vulnerable, takes a deep breath and begins to sing: “Once in royal David’s city, stood a lowly cattle stall.” Soon, the other children join the singing, and eventually so does the congregation. The lights go on, revealing a scene of festive joy. The night moves on to this beautiful service, in which we, too, sing of the joy of this most holy night. But Christmas begins in the darkness; one child, one breath, one song.
2. Christmas begins in the darkness; the deep darkness of which Isaiah spoke long ago. The darkness of sin and suffering, sickness and sorrow. The darkness brought on by the tramping boots of war and the angry cries of hate. The darkness that shadows our hearts and clouds our minds. It can seem as if the darkness will never lift, like we’ll hold our breath forever, waiting for a dawn that will never come.

3. Into this darkness, Christ comes. Not as a warrior king, but as a little baby. One child, brave but vulnerable, born into this world. Luke tells us that Mary gave birth to her firstborn son, Jesus, in Bethlehem. He leaves out the details, but we know that birth itself is a hard, dangerous thing, for both mother and child. He, the very Word of God that was in the beginning, enters this world through Mary, fills his lungs with a first, gasping breath, and lets out his cry. The song of salvation begins in Bethlehem, in the darkness; one child, one breath, one song.

4. Think of it: the eternal Word, the Son of God, of one being with the Father, takes on flesh. Becomes like us, in all ways save sin, to save us from sin. This God, Light from Light, enters into the darkness we have brought into the world. This One, this Christ, becomes human. Bruisable; breakable. This One, this Jesus, who could have remained in the joys of heaven, comes instead to earth. To us. In doing so, Jesus takes on the full vulnerability of what it means to be human. That word, vulnerable, comes to us from Latin, from a root which means "wound." And of course, this is where the story is going. Becoming one of us, Jesus will suffer with us, for us. Be wounded for our transgressions; be killed as religion and empire collude against him. Even resurrected, this One, this only begotten child, will bear the wounds of vulnerability.

5. This is not where we would have looked for the coming of God, we who are so easily impressed with the bright and the shiny. But this is where God comes, born to peasants outside the light and comfort of the inn. And if God would come into that darkness, where will God not appear? Frederick Buechner writes, "Those who believe in God can never in a way be sure of him again. Once they have seen him in a stable, they can never be sure where he will appear or to what lengths he will go or to what ludicrous depths of self-humiliation he will descend in his wild pursuit of humankind. If holiness and the awful power and majesty of God were present in this least auspicious

of all events, this birth of a peasant's child, then there is no place of time so lowly and earthbound but that holiness can be present there, too." God, coming to us in this most surprising way, scatters the darkness. There is no longer anywhere for us to hide. Sinners shrouded in shadow no more, we find our lungs filled with the breath of life, reborn as siblings of the Son of God. Children of God, vulnerable but brave, joining in the song of the angels, going with the angels tell what we have seen.

6. Jesus is born, and the darkness will flee the coming of Light of the World. But Christmas begins in darkness; one child, one breath, one song. As those who are caught up in God's grace, we bear the light and the life of God into the dark places of this world. Christ is vulnerable, suffers when we suffer. And so, we go to the hungry, the hurting, the heartbroken, to offer help and hope in Jesus' name. But first, in this place, in the dark of this night, we stop. We marvel. We take a breath. We join the song. We look to the child born for us, the Son given to us. For through the Christ once born in darkness, nothing will now be the same. Amen.

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