

Sermon – Luke 2:1-20
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Grace Lutheran Church
Christmas Eve – Year C
24 December 2024

“Tomorrow Comes Today”

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. A few days after Christmas last year, I went to worship again. Thanks to the wonders of modern technology, my mom and I were able to watch the recording of the Grace Christmas Eve children’s service of Lessons and Carols, right there in her room in Minnesota. She sat rapt through the opening notes of “Once in Royal David’s City” and the rest of the cross songs. I knew the music would be of the most interest to her, but when the homily began, I let it play. I mean, I thought it was pretty good (if I do say so myself!). She nodded off a bit during it, but when it was done, she said, “That wasn’t too bad.” And a moment later, “Who was that?” I’m still not sure if she was truly confused in the fog of her illness, or if she was taking a motherly jab at me. It would have been in character for her, a twinkle in her eye, reminding me to take myself less seriously. It was also one of the last times I would see her before she died several weeks later. Time is something of which there is never quite enough. We never seem to have enough today.
2. How do we mark and measure time? When does today become tomorrow? Writing in *The Christian Century*, Lee Hull Moses muses, “Is it the first glint of daybreak? The sun over the horizon? Maybe the stroke of midnight—but what is midnight if not a desperate attempt by humans to corral ethereal time? Our markers of time are arbitrary; we are forever at the mercy of the sun. Tonight never really becomes tomorrow. Tomorrow is always out there,

just beyond our grasp.” While in a sense today does become tomorrow, of course, what Pastor Hull Moses seems to mean is that each day is more of the same in this world of sin and violence, suffering and death. That these days do not give way to a new day that is different. Where is there hope for this world?

3. But on this Christmas Eve, as Jesus draws his first mewling breath and Mary’s pain gives way to joy and Joseph sighs with relief; on this night when the angel chorus rends the heavens and the poor shepherds go to bear witness; on this night today catches up with tomorrow. Tomorrow breaks into today. On this night, as true God takes on true humanity in the Incarnation of the Son, the sunrise of a new dawn begins.

4. Luke’s Christmas Gospel begins in *those* days. Days marked by the old order of sin and death, presided over by tyrants like Augustus and Quirinius. Days when the people walked in darkness, just as they had in Isaiah’s time. In those days there is never enough time, always more of the same. But listen to the herald angel: “To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” *This day*. Good news of great joy, indeed. For on this day, God in Christ has become one of us and is the One who is forever with us and for us. Crossing from eternity into time, emptying himself even to the point of death, that life would break in and take hold of us forever. That time would never run out again. That all of our losses would be taken up again in the love of God that refuses to let death have the last word. That insists that peace will reign. That calls us into the dawn of eternal day, shaping our days even in this world, even now.

5. When we wake tomorrow, there will still be much in the world that is not as it should be. But we are called, like the shepherds before us, to bear witness to the work of God. The shepherds saw a world that had no room for Joseph and Mary. Who among us has no place? The Brazilian theologian Vítor

Westhelle asks, “Do we see the exiled, the abandoned, the aged, and impoverished and still not know that every poor person impoverishes us even as we dwell in luxury?” And again, “Don’t we know that every homeless person makes the places in which we live a little less than a home?”

Westhelle reminds us that, in his Incarnation, Jesus both brings us into the eternal and brings the eternal into our now. That in taking on our humanity, Jesus divinely affirms that value of every human. As his body in this world, the call of Christmas is to make a place for all people, space in which the grace of God takes hold, turning us from violence and despair, turning us toward each other with compassion and peace.

6. Tonight, here in the darkness, we see a new light begin once more to shine. In Christ, God has bound Godself to us. Tonight, in the flickering light, let us come with the shepherds into the presence of our Lord. Tonight, with the angels, let us sing forth songs of praise. Tonight, with Mary, let us ponder the mystery and the majesty of the God who would do such things for us. Tonight, let us live in the new tomorrow that gives hope to all our days. Tonight, let us eat a foretaste of the unending feast to come as together we catch glimmering glimpses of the glory still to come. Tonight, we are given the gifts of faith and hope. And as one preacher puts it, “Faith is the ability to hear the melody of the future, and hope is the courage to dance to its tune today. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it. The light shines, welcoming us into forever with God. Merry Christmas, friends. Amen.

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