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“How Christ Came”

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Luke 1:26-35

It is Twelve Days until Christmas and while that does remind me of a song, instead I will share a poem by Dr. Suess which expresses how I feel these days:

“How did it get so late so soon?
It’s night before its afternoon.
It’s December before its June.
My how the time has flown.
How did it get so late so soon?”

Today we are examining **how** Jesus came into this world,
and this is an unusual circumstance to say the least.

To my way of thinking, when we consider how Jesus came into the world,
there is no better version than that of a kid. Monica Lynch explained it this way:

“Once upon a time there was this girl named Mary.

She was born without any sin on her, and she didn’t even commit sins
when she had a chance to.

She married this man named Joseph, and he sinned a lot.

God decided he needed to send His son to keep everybody
from sinning all the time.

God decided Mary should be the mother and sent Gabriel to tell her.

The angel came and almost scared Mary to death.

He said: “Hail Mary” full of something, I don’t know what.

He kept on talking but Mary interrupted to say it would be OK with her
to be the mother of God, only she didn’t say it that way.

She used an old fashioned way of talking.

The angel left and Mary went to see her cousin.

Mary told Elizabeth she was going to be the mother of God,

And Elizabeth was so happy, she had a baby too.

I forgot to say that the Romans had conquered the Jews,

And the Romans were much meaner, they had better knives and shields.

They wanted to know how many Jews they had, so everyone had to be counted up.

Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem to be counted up.

When they got there, it was full, there was no place to stay.

They had to sleep in a stable full of dirty animals and everything.

And that is where Jesus was born, around those dirty animals.

After they got counted up they went to live in Nazareth,
because they did not want to live in the stable all the time.

So they went to Nazareth and lived happily ever after.”

There are many versions of how Christ came.
 Several years ago we traveled to California to visit my mother-in-law.
 She got tickets to the Crystal Cathedral's "Glory of Christmas."
 It is something else, a multi-million dollar holiday extravaganza.
 They had people flying around over your head dressed as angels,
 Live camels, donkeys, sheep, the wise men come in riding huge stallions,
 Lavish costumes, a full orchestra and choir.
 And "The Glory of Christmas" is described as an experience which will help you
 "...recapture the true *simplicity* of that very first Christmas."

Even the prophet Isaiah, who announced the coming of the Messiah
 offered his own unique spin on the prophecy foretold.
 Isaiah said that the coming King would sit in splendor on David's throne.
 That he would crush competing armies and of his rule there would be no end.
 Now the Biblical accounts themselves differ as to exactly how Jesus was born.
 I told you last week that only two Gospels have birth narratives, and they are quite
 different accounts.

Luke has shepherds, Matthew does not.
 Matthew says nothing at all about them traveling to Bethlehem for the census,
 or about Jesus being born in a manger.
 Luke says nothing about a star in the sky over the place where the baby was born,
 or the Kings coming to visit.
 Was it in winter or summer; was it in a cave or a barn? We just don't know.
 But we do know that something stunning and miraculous happened with this birth.

The birth stories are meaningful not so much for their precise details,
 as for the way that they illuminate the importance of this life and what it will bring
 into the world.

Ordinarily no one waits outside a hospital room for a great person to be born.
 A person becomes great and then the significance of their birth
 takes on new and deeper meaning.
 We celebrate the birthdays of many famous people,
 not just because of their births, but because of what they did during their lives.
 So too with Jesus. While his birth was an event that changed human history,
 it was his adult life that people found so astonishing, so clearly divine.
 His life, death and resurrection gave stories about his birth increased significance.

His being, his teaching, his miracles, his spiritual power, and the experience of God people had in his presence.

All of this caused people much later to examine the circumstances of his birth.

Our Scripture today is taken from Luke 1:26-35:

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.

He said, “Hail, favored one, God is with you!”

She was greatly troubled and wondered what sort of greeting this might be.

The angel said “Do not be afraid, Mary for you have found favor with God.

You will conceive and bear a son and shall call him Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

And Mary said to the angel: “How shall this be, since I have no husband?”

And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of God will overshadow you. This child will be called holy the Son of God.

Can you imagine how Mary must have felt?

She was a shy, sheltered teenage girl from a poor family.

No angel had ever visited her before.

Nothing astonishing or incredible had happened to her before.

And now this peasant girl was chosen to be the mother of God in the flesh.

Now the whole virgin birth story is amazing, and hard to explain, and of course there are differing perspectives upon exactly what it all means.

Both Matthew and Luke agree that Jesus had an earthly mother but not an earthly father. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit of God.

So it is really a virgin conception and fortunately for you I will not go into the details or show diagrams on the screens with children present. You get the idea.

No earthly father.

Now this is not the only record of a virgin birth in the ancient world.

We do find a few other stories like this in Egyptian, Roman, Greek and Hindu traditions, so it was not completely uncommon.

Such miraculous birth stories served to distinguish a particular person from the ordinary masses, and this was a way of letting the world know this is much more than human power at work.

In Jesus’ case, so much would happen during his short life which would validate

the circumstances of his birth. His life would underscore the belief that everything about this man was extraordinary.

He spoke on behalf of God and did so with authority. He performed miracles, cared for the poor and suffering, and talked about mercy, forgiveness, and love. His words and actions, his suffering and death, all verified the idea that he was indeed God in the flesh.

Little did Mary know what was ahead for her when the angel first visited her and told her she would be mother to the Messiah.

The birth itself would be minor compared to the events that lay ahead. Her life would change and her heart would be broken again and again.

I really appreciate this parment that hangs on our pulpit during Advent. It depicts a cradle and a cross, and you do not see those two things together very often. But they are a stunning reminder that the manger which first held the bread of life was rocked in the shadow of the cross.

There was a foreshadowing of things to come, because from the moment of his birth, Jesus' death loomed on the horizon as fulfillment of his destiny on behalf of humankind.

As we consider how Jesus first came, I have to say that the precise details are really not that important.

Of course we love the stories we hear about and sing about this time of year, it lends a magic and mystery that is lovely.

Yet ultimately the details are not the point.

The point is that with this birth God entered our reality to help us, heal us, and save us from ourselves.

God said "Stop!" I am doing a new thing that will change human experience. This humble life will reflect my love for you, will give you freedom from fear, worry, suffering, and even death. Nothing will ever be the same.

How Jesus came does not matter as much as the fact that he did indeed come.

Pure Love once walked among us, full of grace and truth,
and walks among us still.

And that makes all the difference, not just at Christmas, but always.

Thanks Be To God.

