

Christmas Day, December 25, 2009, Year C

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector

Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

"Christmas – The Promise Fulfilled"

The Angel said: "*Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*" (Luke 2:10-11) Before the foundation of the world was laid, God planned that His Son would be the sacrifice to pay for the sins of mankind. The world needed as Savior – and God's only Son – Jesus is that Savior! In the 3rd chapter of Genesis, and all the way throughout the Old Testament - prophecy after prophecy proclaimed that the Messiah would come, He would be born and live among us as the Lamb of God that takes away our sins. Before the world could have Easter Sunday – there had to be Christmas – the birth of God's Messiah – the Christ.

Mary and Joseph had been chosen by God - Mary, to be the mother of God's Son, and Joseph to be the one commissioned to take care of them.

In my confirmation class this past Saturday, I showed the class of 19 kids some video clips from the movie "The Nativity Story" and they got to see an example of the cultural pressures of the day, especially as rumor and gossip began to flow through the streets of Nazareth because Mary was expecting a child even before she and Joseph had married. They saw the evil King Herod as he enforced Caesar Augustus's decree that every family must return to their home town for a world-wide census. So even though the baby is due at any time, Mary and Joseph had to make the journey all the way to Bethlehem from Nazareth. Nazareth is in the north, in the Galilee region, and Bethlehem is south in Judea, and that trip is about 80 miles long. They had to walk – with only the aid of a donkey. They made that journey with no comfortable accommodations, no clean sheets to sleep between, no TV sets to entertain them. Slowly they traveled, sleeping out underneath the stars, and remember and once they arrived in Bethlehem there is the complication of finding lodging.

These same young people looked at the film in disbelief that Bethlehem looked as it did – small stone buildings. As Mary's time to give birth approached - Joseph banged on door after door. Because of the tenacity of Joseph, and perhaps the compassion of the person who owned the stable, they were offered to stay in a place where animals feed, and they found shelter for the night. Indeed there must have been quite a commotion.

On the night Jesus was born, it was a private celebration at first - just Mary and Joseph, and the animals. They knew something no one else knew. They knew that this baby was God's own Son, and that His birth was a miracle. Soon the celebration got larger; angels spoke to shepherds and announced that a Savior had been born, who is Christ the Lord. The shepherds came rushing to see the new baby. It is quite possible that some people from the little town of Bethlehem even came out and peeked through cracks in the wall to see what was going on, and then joined in the celebration. But, they're not mentioned in Gospel account.

When Micah, the Old Testament prophet, foretold the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, he emphasized its simplicity and lack of significance to the world. "*But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.*" (Micah 5:2)

Bethlehem – *Bet Lechem* - "*The House of Bread.*" Bread is one of life's most common and

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needed things. God wanted His Son to be available to the entire world. His birth was announced to shepherds, the common man, but not to King Herod. His cradle was a manger, an animal's feeding trough in a lowly stable. Imagine – God's only Son, born among animals, humbling Himself in such a way. God was telling us that there is no human so low that he or she is outside the reach of the love of God!

Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, "the house of bread", to satisfy the spiritual hunger of mankind. Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."* (John 6:35) Bread is a good comparison to our Lord because He satisfies, gratifies, and strengthens us spiritually just as bread does for us physically.

Unfortunately there are some who are not hungry for this bread, and they might even be described as eating at the wrong table. God said through the Prophet Isaiah *"Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance."* (Isaiah 55:2) There are a lot of things that bring us temporary happiness and temporary fulfillment, but believe me - only Jesus Christ satisfies the eternal element of the human spirit – the inner being, the soul.

There's a story in the Bible about a man who had a lot of things going for him, but he wasn't living up to his potential. That man's name was Saul and he lacked self-confidence. He didn't understand that God had a plan for his life. When the prophet Samuel told Saul that he was God's choice to be king of Israel, he foretold several things that Saul would see in the near future so that Saul would be certain that the message was truly from God. Among them was a man carrying three loaves of bread. (1 Samuel 10:3) Three loaves were far more than Samuel could eat in a meal. He would have enough left over for future needs. It is a beautiful image of the sufficiency of the work of Almighty God in the life of His servants and it is the image of the sufficiency of God's spiritual provision for His people.

Jesus Christ is all that a person needs for spiritual satisfaction – for spiritual completeness. That fact that Jesus was born in "The House of Bread" gives us confidence in the fact that God has chosen us to be His children, no matter how insignificant we may seem to ourselves or to the world around us. This is huge! God loves us enough to walk in our shoes – as a human being – and to draw us to Himself – with all of our inadequacies.

A question that I ask my confirmation class is this: what books of the Bible are about Jesus? The answer is simple – ALL OF THEM! The Old Testament - from Genesis to Malachi – God continues to point to the need for a Savior – and He leaves us "bread crumbs" along the way – to alert the world how to recognize Him when He comes. A perfect example of this is in Genesis 22 when Isaac asks his father Abraham – *"where is the lamb for the sacrifice?"* Abraham's answer points right to Jesus – when he says *"God himself will provide the lamb."* Indeed, God Himself is the Lamb!

Each year the people of Israel – the Jewish people, celebrate when they were saved by the "blood of the lamb" on the very first Passover – which is God's alerting His people that they will one day be saved by the Blood of His own Lamb – Jesus Christ. In Exodus 16, the Israelites – who were saved from bondage in Egypt, were given bread from heaven, new each morning in the form of manna – and one day they would receive true bread from heaven in Jesus.

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Believe me I could go on and on – but this is Christmas Day – and we all have much to do – so I will get right to the point: I can list at least 116 Old Testament prophecies that have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God laid out the information pointing to the truth that we celebrate today as declared in John 1:1-3, 14 *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* God Himself took on flesh to save humanity from itself. Jesus Christ is the promise of God fulfilled – fulfilled by God Himself.

Christ was born in Bethlehem, "the house of bread" to teach us that each one of us must choose him as Savior for ourselves. It has to be our own personal choice – no one can make it for us. If one person eats a meal, it doesn't satisfy another person's hunger. The Apostle Paul reminds us *“Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.”* (1 Corinthians 10:17) That "one bread" is Jesus Christ. He is the only bread that offers life and the decision to receive Him is an individual one, a personal one. *“For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*

This morning, we celebrate the birth of the baby – Jesus Christ, into the world, as the promise of God – but we also celebrate and give thanks for the grown Jesus, who went to the cross – so that His sacrifice would complete God's promise of our salvation – and that His body and blood would be shed, in our place – so that we might live. Jesus Christ is indeed the “Bread of Life” because of what He has done for us. Baptized believers of Jesus will come forward in just a few moments to receive the consecrated bread and wine – as the real presence of Jesus Christ – in Holy Communion; a most precious gift that He has given to us.

Jesus Himself said, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”* (Revelation 3:20) Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, "The House of Bread" so that He could come into our hearts and into our lives - if we let Him. He wants to feed us for all eternity – but we need to give Him permission. We need to let Him into our lives. If you have never opened the door of your heart to Jesus Christ – what better day than today to start– the day that we remember His simple birth in a manger.

He is standing at the door and knocking. Will you open the door to Him today?