

Sermon: Christmas Day

Text: Luke 2:1-20 (v. 15)

Theme: I believe in Jesus Christ...

Goal: To focus on the core of Christmas: I believe that the Son of God comes to me

Dear Friends,

Introduction: I watched a street interview made in Germany, where people were asked: Why do we celebrate Christmas? Most of the people, old and young, didn't know what Christmas means. The answers were the most ridiculous you can imagine: It's a family reunion... I grew up this way... It has to do with Santa Claus... Jesus died on that day... Sorry, I'm not from this city; I don't know what is happening... Only one answered, but with doubts: It is the day Jesus was born on, but... what was the name of his mother? Eve Marie???

Traditions are overlapping the truth, the Good News God renews at every Christmas. I think this is not our case, because we are here to celebrate the coming of Jesus, and we confess: *I believe... in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary...*

To celebrate Christmas is a matter of faith, not just tradition. There are good traditions, and I like them. But faith is what really matters. The Christmas Story is a story of people of faith!

I – The faith of Mary

It was not easy for the teenager Mary to believe in the message the angel delivered to her. Was she chosen by God to be the mother of the Promised Messiah? Why she? But she didn't question or doubt. She believed and just said: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). Her cousin, Elizabeth acknowledged her faith when she said: "Blessed is she

who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished" (Luke 1:45). Living by faith, Mary gave birth to the Son of God. And in all events surrounding the birth of her Holy Son, "Mary treasured up all things and pondered them in her hearth." This faith gave her strength to support seeing her Son hanging on a cross 33 years later, and to have the joy of seeing Him back to life on Easter Sunday! She remained faithful to God's promises, joining the apostles and the first Christian Church in Jerusalem after Jesus went back to heaven (Acts 1:14).

## II – The faith of Joseph

It was not easy either for Joseph to accept that his fiancé, Mary was pregnant; he didn't have anything to do with this pregnancy; they hadn't had sexual relationship yet. And it was not easy for him to believe in the words of the angel who appeared to him in a dream, saying: "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

But he believed, and "when Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus" (Matthew 1:20,21,24,25).

## III – The faith of the shepherds

It was not easy for the shepherds to believe in the message of the angel. Why didn't the angel appear to the High Priest in the temple and to the Teachers of the Law to announce it to all people? They were in charge of proclaiming God's Word, and they could have reached much more people with the Good News shared by the angels than the shepherds...

And why to go to a stable and not to a palace to find the Savior, the Christ, the Lord?

But without any doubt, the shepherds left their sheep on the fields and hurried off, saying: “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” –

Note a detail in this text: They didn’t say, “what the *angel* has told us...”, but, “what the **Lord** has told us about”. - Many do not believe in the Word of the Lord written in the Bible, but they want to see a special miracle, or a sign in their life to believe. The same Word of God announced by the angels has been proclaimed through the centuries by God’s messengers Christmas after Christmas. And people, even in Christian countries, don’t listen to this proclamation and don’t believe in God’s Word: “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today a Savior has been born to you; he is the Christ.”

IV – We believe

I assume that all of us came to the Christmas Service this morning because we believe ... *in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary...* We came to celebrate the true Christmas and to praise God for His gift to us: His Holy Son, born of the virgin Mary. If we don’t believe that Christmas is for **us**, that Jesus came for **us**, that He came to rescue **us** from sin, death and eternal condemnation, something is missing from our Christmas Celebration. The angel is clear in his message: “I bring **you** good news of great joy that will be for **all** the people... a Savior has been born to **you!**”

Everything Jesus did, from His birth to His ascension, is not just a story, but it was done for **you** and for me! When Luther explained the Holy Communion, he stressed: *That person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: ‘Given and shed **for you** for the forgiveness of sins.’ But anyone who*

*does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared; for the words 'for you' require all hearts to believe.*

(Small Catechism).

Conclusion: What happened on earth is too simple and even crazy for an ordinary person to believe: A virgin conceived, a baby laying in a manger, shepherds telling about a vision they had... that Jesus is a Savior because He died on a cross like the worst of the sinners... and that guy rose again after being buried for three days... I cannot believe it *by my own reason or strength... but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith* (Small Catechism).

The same Holy Spirit that worked faith in Mary, in Joseph and in the shepherds *calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith* (Small Catechism). He shows us not only the simple and ordinary things that happened on earth, but He shows us what happened in heaven: God, out of love, sent His only begotten Son to earth, as a simple man like you and me, but without sin, to pay for our sins and to give us peace with God and peace with our conscience. Reconciled with God through the birth, perfect obedience, death and resurrection of Jesus, we are in peace and we have hope. Like Mary said in her Magnificat: "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior", we also glorify God because He has mercy on us and calls us to this true faith in His Son Jesus Christ, whose birth we remember and celebrate with joy every year.

Merry Christmas with Jesus! May God preserve us all in this true faith. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 25 December 2016