

Christmas Eve Sermon, 2017. Jesus, the GPS to God!

Well, it's here. Christmas Eve. Advent, the four week time of waiting for Christmas and getting everything ready is now officially over. The bazaars, the shopping, the baking, cleaning, the decorating, the attending to and coordinating all the extra and special events that happen only this time of year -- the hustle and bustle of preparing is pretty well done. Yes, there'll be meals to prepare, travelling to do or guests to receive, but most of the heavy lifting, so to speak, is complete. Yes, it is a busy time of year! And this is a very good time for me to say thank you to all of you who do double duty, at home and at church. Thank you for your faithful and loving service to your church family!

So, now you're here. Take a breath, and relax. You've come to church, to sit for a bit, to rest in the peace of God, to experience the true meaning of Christmas. I'm hoping that you've come here to experience the grace of God, and God's grace is experiential—we sense, we do feel God's touch. Maybe you'll feel it in the music, the well known carols, or sense it in the beauty of this sacred space, or in the saying of the prayers, some familiar, some maybe new to you. Perhaps you're more of a tactile person, and you will experience God's grace in the receiving of the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Or maybe, just maybe you will discern the presence of God in these words that I've written and sharing with you. In any or all of these things we can feel God's grace. An experience of God's love, that is what church is at it's very best. And no better time than on this sacred and holy night, when we celebrate the anniversary of the day God's love came to God's people in the form of a real live baby boy. God's only begotten son; he came to earth -- why? Because God so loved the world, that he sent Jesus into this messed up world, to save us from ourselves, and show us how to get back to the ways of God, the life God really wants for us -- because humanity has lost the true way. So, then, how do we find that way, how to we get back to God's true desires for us, the people of God's creation? The life of Jesus shows us, Jesus is the way. You could say he's the GPS to God!

And it all started, well, if you get right down to it, nine months before Christmas Eve! When the life of a young woman whom we call Mary took an amazing turn, when she found out that God had chosen her to bear God's son. And what was Mary's response to Gabrielle, God's angelic messenger? After a quick question as to how this could actually happen, her answer back to Gabrielle was 'Ok Lord, if that's what you want, I'm good with it.' Quite incredible when you think about it, a young girl, probably around 15 years old, scholars figure, says 'I am the Lord's servant, let it be as God wills.' It took me the better part of 5 years to fully accept that God was just calling me to the priest hood, and I was, shall we say, of more mature years! And let's not forget Joseph, the man to whom Mary was engaged. His fiancé turns up to be with child, and not with his child, but by the Spirit of God. Yeah, right, pregnant by God's Holy Spirit. That couldn't have been easy to believe. And God's asking him to not break off their engagement, which is of course his first instinct, but instead marry this young woman and take on the responsibility of her and the child. Now, that's going on faith—for both Mary and Joseph. And that's just the beginning of the story of the Christ child—the grace of God turning up and changing lives when we least expect it. God's grace breaks into our lives often when we're not looking for it, and can change our lives in amazing ways, in more and different ways than we could ever ask or imagine.

And that really, of course, is the story of Jesus' birth—God come to us, breaking into humanity, and changing lives in amazing ways! And coming as a baby, no less! The son of God is born, as a human being, a boy child. To a humble couple who said yes to God's call, a call that changed their lives in ways they could never have

envisioned in a million years. The Christ Child, the son of God, the Prince of Peace, was not born into royalty, or to a rich family or even a middle class one, but born in a barn, and his crib a manger, an animal's feed trough. "This baby, resting in a manger on the night of his birth, will be the 'bread of God...which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world,'" (*John 6, 33*)¹ I had never connected this together into one thought before. This child in the feed trough becomes "the very 'bread of life' ". (*John 6.35*)² How very fitting that we come together at the communion table tonight, celebrating the Lord's Supper on the anniversary of Jesus' birth.

This really special and remarkable story is one that we have heard so often that I wonder if we don't truly appreciate the significance of it -- because it's so familiar to us. We have a God who wanted to do more than just speak through the mouths of prophets. We have a God who did what seems to be a very un-god like thing, to be born as a human being, to come down and live among us! The 'churchy' term for that is Incarnation - which means "the assumption of human nature by God in the person of Jesus"³. Christianity is the only religion in the world where God is born into human form, coming to us in person, you could say—a true one-on-one experience. Not just to tell people the way to God through the mouth of a prophet but God literally reaching out and touching humanity with God's love, speaking to us directly the word of God, teaching us God's ways, showing us the way of life that saves. And recorded by people who were there, or heard the experiences of those who were there.

It's really pretty amazing. The Creator God, the Almighty, for our sakes—not God's sake, because I can't see why Jesus would do this for his own sake, because he certainly didn't have an easy time of it on earth! The Son of God assumes a human body, and chooses to live with, in and among the common people--like woman and children, poor and marginalized folks, the ones whom society has no respect for, healing them and helping them deal with and all the hassles that day to day life brings. And Lord knows, Jesus had more than his share of hassles and challenges, in his life—and in his death. And if you ponder that for a moment, it's quite a choice for God to make, isn't it? Our God is a God that's not afraid to get down and dirty and into the thick of things. So we know that Jesus gets it; what our lives are like, he literally walked the walk and talked the talk.

And Jesus came because God loves us, we, the creatures of God's creation are loved so much, that God the Son, chose to live among humanity so as to show us the way to live as children of God, to come to know and live in the light of Christ's love. And by following the ways of life, the example of Jesus life, his teachings, by our faith in Christ, we are saved. Did you know that his very name 'Jesus' or 'Yeshua' in Hebrew means 'the Lord helps, the Lord saves'?

Jesus' life shows us the way, so we can follow in Christ's footsteps, and find our way back to God.

Yup, so I guess we really can call Jesus the ultimate GPS. Amen

The Rev'd JoAnn Todd
The Anglican Parish of Hanover - Durham

¹ Kimberly Bracken Long in Homiletical Perspective for Luke 2: 1-14 in Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol 1 p. 121

² Ibid

³ *Christian Theology: An Introduction* p. 572.