

Media Notes

There is a video to share about the upcoming worship series.

There is a video to share about the Christmas offering.

There is a video to start the sermon.

There are black slides built in for the Candle Lighting Ceremony



Key Questions, Metadata and Outline

What is this sermon about?

This sermon is about the birth of Christ and what this means for our life and our world.

Why is this sermon important?

This sermon is important because at Christmas, God came to be with us.

What is the context of this sermon?

This sermon is preached as part of my third Candlelight Christmas Eve at First United Methodist Church of El Dorado.

What are the next action steps?

- Choose good.
- Find life.
- Share the light of Christ.

What is the good news (bottom line)?

The good news of Christmas is that God is with us.
God comes to bring light into the darkness and enables us to live in the light.

Metadata

1. Topic(s)
 1. Christmas
2. Sermon Books of the Bible
 1. Isaiah
 2. Luke
 3. Matthew
3. Series
 1. Seek

Christmas Eve
Seek - The Christ (Candlelight Christmas Eve)
First United Methodist Church of El Dorado
Text Online at <http://j.mp/15KSobU>

December 24, 2014
Luke 2:1-20
Preaching Target Word Count: 2,472
Video is not available online

4. Speaker
 1. Andrew Conard
5. Tags
 1. Christmas, life, good, light, Christ, darkness

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
Luke 2:1-20, NIV	5
Response to Scripture	
Introduction	5
Sermon Starter Video	
Series Review	
Sermon Notes and Scripture Study	
Opening	6
Prayer	
The Magic of Christmas Lights	
Transition	
Tragedy, Loss and Darkness	7
World News	
Family and Friends	
We come to find Jesus	
Transition	
The Place - Bethlehem	8
Distance	
House of Bread	
Transition	
The People - Mary and Joseph	8
Young and Humble	
Pregnant	
Transition	
The News - Shepherds and Angels	9
Socio-Economic	

Night Shift	
Visit from a Shepherd	
Transition	
Story to Significance	10
Reality of Darkness	10
Choices	
People Walking in Darkness	
Transition	
Jesus' Life, Death and Resurrection	11
Emmanuel - God with Us	
Life and Ministry	
Crucifixion	
Resurrection	
Church	
Transition	
Conclusion	11
Good News	
Call to Action	
Hope for Eternity	
Hope for Now	
Worst Thing is Never the Last Thing	
Invitation	
Closing Prayer	

Luke 2:1-20, NIV

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Response to Scripture

One: The Word of God for the People of God.

All: **Thanks be to God!**

Introduction

Sermon Starter Video

Play sermon starter video.

*** Start Sermon Timer ***

Series Review

Over the past four weeks, we have been taking a look at the story of the very first Christmas and those that were seeking God or those whom God was seeking.

1. We began the season of preparation with story of the angel seeking Mary to tell her the good news she was expecting a child. We learned from Mary that nothing is impossible for God.¹ Even when what God asks is hard and difficult, we can say yes.
2. Then we looked closer at the story of the Humble – Mary and Joseph – and the good news that God chooses the humble to be used for God’s purposes – even people like you and me.
3. Two Sundays ago, we heard the story of the Outsiders – the shepherds – and the good news that Jesus’ birth brings a kingdom in which all are welcome, especially those on the outside.
4. Last Sunday, the Seeker – wise men – was our focus and the good news that we seek Christ and worship because God first loved us.

Tonight we come to come to Candlelight Christmas Eve and we find ourselves seeking Christ.

Sermon Notes and Scripture Study

I invite you to open your bulletin to a place where you can take notes during the message today. I believe that God is seeking you tonight. Whenever you feel that God is speaking to you directly – it may be in the sermon, later in the service or it may have already happened – write it down so you can remember it in the days ahead.

Opening

Prayer

Will you pray with me? O God, use these words to speak good news so that as individuals and as a congregation we will fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but you and live as part of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

The Magic of Christmas Lights

I really enjoy Christmas lights.

Our house is perfect for hanging lights. There is a straight roofline and we have lights hanging on each side of the house that faces the street. We even have a smart outlet so you can have them come on automatically 30 minutes before the sun sets.

It’s not just the lights at our house, though.

¹ Luke 1:37, CEB.

I like to look at them as I drive at night.
The big displays that seem to cover every square inch of house and the short strings that bring a bit of color to a dark street corner.
They light up the dark.
It's magical.

Transition

Christmas does not always feel magical. Trying to get everything done - all the gifts wrapped, travel plans made, food cooked, pictures taken. It can be a crazy season. Where is the peace that the angels tell the shepherds about?

Tragedy, Loss and Darkness

World News

Then when we turn on the news we don't seem to find that peace either. Looking back over 2014, we see headlines of

- Domestic violence by NFL players and know that there are countless families for whom this does not make the news
- The Islamic State creating a brutal year in Syria and Iraq
- Racial tension and violence in Missouri and New York
- Malaysia Airlines losing a plane over the Pacific and having one shot down over Ukraine.
- The deadliest Ebola epidemic on record, claiming over 5,000 lives.

It is difficult to make sense of the message of peace and joy on a night like tonight when we know that the reality of our lives can sometimes be so different.

Family and Friends

Closer to home, this is the first Christmas for some here tonight since a loved one has died. There are family members and friends who are spending tonight in the hospital recovering from illness or accident.

How do we find hope in the midst of the tragedy, loss and darkness?

How do we find light in the midst of darkness that seems to fill our lives at times?

We come to find Jesus

We come to church to find Jesus, who brings light and hope.

We listen to the Christmas story.

We share in Holy Communion

We light candles.

We are here to celebrate and remember that God is with us.

Transition

So let's go back to that very first Christmas over 2,000 years ago and hear the story again.

The Place - Bethlehem

Distance

The story takes place in the town of Bethlehem, which located just south of Jerusalem. From Bethlehem to the Jerusalem was about 5.5 miles. This is about as far as if you walked out the front steps, went east on Central, turned north on Bluestem Road and ended up at the State Park Offices.

House of Bread

Bethlehem means literally, "House of Bread," which was likely in reference to a main industry at the time of Jesus - baking. Bethlehem was a small village and was likely not prominent on any of the maps of the time.

Transition

This is the place where God comes to be with us.

The People - Mary and Joseph

Mary and Joseph had come back to Joseph's home town. They were under orders from the Roman government to be there for a census to be taken. What this meant for Mary was that she was at the in-laws at this time of year. This was not going to be an ordinary visit.

Young and Humble

Mary was a young girl, probably 12, 13 or 14. Joseph was a woodworker, a carpenter. They did not build houses out of wood, so he probably built doors, farm implements to use in the field and helped repair them.

Pregnant

Nine months ago, before she and Joseph were married, Mary found out that she was pregnant. This was not good news for them. When Joseph heard that Mary was pregnant, he decided to end their engagement quietly. He chose the grace filled option, because otherwise her punishment would have been death. The scripture from Matthew 1:20-23 tells us what happened next.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “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.”

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).²

Here they are, nine months later.

They realize, this baby is coming today.

It is going to be born tonight.

Transition

These are the people who are there when God comes to be with us.

The News - Shepherds and Angels

Jesus was born to Mary that night and God’s messengers, the angels, bring the news of the birth of Jesus first to shepherds that were working nearby.

Socio-Economic

It can be easy to romanticize shepherds, but let’s be realistic. In the first century, they were among the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder. Shepherds were associated with people who were less educated and generally living in poverty.

Night Shift

You might own sheep, yet it was different if you were the one that was actually watching the sheep at night. These were the night shift shepherds and this meant that, even among shepherds, they were among the least respected.

Visit from a Shepherd

They were not the kind of people you invited over to your home or to the hospital to hold a newborn baby—at least not straight from work.

At work, they were arms deep in sheep.

They tended to have a sheepy aroma about them.

They were clearly on the outside.

Transition

This is how the news of the birth of Jesus, God with us, begins to spread.

² Matthew 1:20-23, NIV.

Story to Significance

So God came to be with us as the baby of an unwed teenage girl. On this night, God came to be with us as a crying, wrinkled baby brought into the world on bloody straw far from home.

It was in this way and into this world that God sent his son, Jesus. God came to be with us in to:

- push back the darkness in our lives,
- seek those who are lost, and
- bring light to the darkness of our world.

Reality of Darkness

The reality is that there are still stories of tragedy, loss and darkness. Let me be clear, these things are never God's plan.

Choices

God gives us the ability to make choices and never intends for us to choose evil and give in to the darkness that has the potential to overwhelm us. The ability to choose to love God and live in the light comes with the ability to choose to turn away from God and live in the darkness. Every day, each one of us has the same choice to make - between light and dark.

People Walking in Darkness

Years before Jesus was born, the writer of Isaiah writes these words:

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."³

Transition

We read these words as looking forward to the birth of Christ. This is true.

Of course, they are also about us, aren't they?

Every one of us, at times, walking in darkness or living in deep darkness in some part of our life.

This is why the story of Christmas is for us.

³ Isaiah 9:2, NIV.

Jesus' Life, Death and Resurrection

Emmanuel - God with Us

Jesus is born to bring light into the darkness of our lives and our world.
Emmanuel, God with us.
God takes on flesh... for us! ... for the darkness in our lives!

Life and Ministry

Jesus is born bringing light to the world, yet the story does not end there.
That baby grew up, he called disciples, healed people, taught and shared about the kingdom of God. He showed us how to love God and love our neighbor.

Crucifixion

Along the way, he made a lot of people mad and he was finally executed by the state. In the most beautiful and epic portion of the entire scripture, Jesus hangs on the cross and prays Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Resurrection

But that is still not the end of the story.
On the third day Jesus rose from the dead.
He is raised to life to give us hope.
He lives and reigns forever with God.

Church

Then the church is born by the power of the Holy Spirit to change the world and make disciples of all people.

Transition

This is the story that starts tonight.

Conclusion

Good News

The good news of Christmas is that God is with us.
God comes to bring light into the darkness and enables us to live in the light.

Call to Action

Hope for Eternity

We look forward to the day when Christ returns and the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ.

And he shall reign forever and ever.

One day, there will be no more sorrow, no more pain and no more suffering for the old has passed away. Christ comes to us at Christmas and Christ will come again.

Hope for Now

The coming of Christ at Christmas does not just bring promises to be fulfilled in the future. God with us is a reality now.

We can live with God today, as a part of God's kingdom, in our everyday life.

God shows us the way and invites us to love God and our neighbor.

Our lives and actions can be part of God's work bringing light into darkness.

Worst Thing is Never the Last Thing

No matter what tragedy, loss or darkness is real for you now, remember that the worst thing you can imagine is never the last thing.

God's love and light are stronger than any darkness or evil we may face.

Invitation

God comes to bring light into darkness.

Peace when our live seems crazy.

Order when things seem out of control.

This Christmas, know that God is with us.

Choose good.

Find life.

Share the light of Christ.

Will you pray with me?

Closing Prayer

Holy God, we confess that there are times when we live in darkness. We are sorry. Thank you for the birth of Jesus to bring great light to shine in the darkness of our lives. Please fill us with your Holy Spirit and give us the gift of love for you and all people today and always. We offer ourselves to you, in Jesus name, Amen.

7 p.m.

Sermon Time