

### Media and Graphics Notes

<b>Word of Witness Video?</b>	
<b>Sermon Starter Video?</b>	Yes
<b>Sermon Notes?</b>	There are no sermon notes on screen
<b>Other Notes</b>	See the lighting ritual document. We will sing the first verse of Silent Night without lyrics. The presentation is set to start with the second verse.

## Key Questions

### ***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 fourth 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

### **Topic(s)**

1. Changing Lives
2. Sharing Christ
3. Transformation of the World

Christmas Eve  
A Season of Hope - Christ is Born  
First United Methodist Church of El Dorado  
Text Online at <http://j.mp/1lbou2u>

December 24, 2015  
Luke 2:1-20  
Preaching Target Word Count: 2,016  
Audio Online at <http://j.mp/1JaX4dt>

#### 4. Worship

### **Sermon Books of the Bible**

1. Isaiah
2. Luke
3. Matthew
4. Revelation

### **Tags**

sermon, worship, church, Methodist, UnitedMethodist, UnitedMethodistChurch, FirstUnitedMethodistChurch, Eldorado, Kansas, GreatPlains, AnnualConference, GreatPlainsAnnualConference, Christmas, life, good, light, Christ, darkness, ChristmasEve

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## Table of Contents

<b>Luke 2:1-20, CEB</b>	<b>5</b>
Response to Scripture	5
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
Sermon Starter Video	5
Series Review	5
Prayer	6
<b>Opening</b>	<b>6</b>
Hospital Visit	6
Elevator Trip	
Neonatal Transport	
Transition	
<b>Tragedy, Loss and Darkness</b>	<b>7</b>
Family and Friends	7
We come to find Jesus	7
Transition	
<b>The Place - Bethlehem</b>	<b>8</b>
Distance	8
House of Bread	8
Transition	
<b>The People - Mary and Joseph</b>	<b>8</b>
Young and Humble	8
Pregnant	8
Transition	
<b>The News - Shepherds and Angels</b>	<b>9</b>
Socio-Economic	9
Visit from a Shepherd	9
Transition	
<b>Story to Significance</b>	<b>9</b>

<b>Reality of Darkness</b>	<b>10</b>
Choices	10
People Walking in Darkness	10
Transition	
<b>Jesus' Life, Death and Resurrection</b>	<b>10</b>
Emmanuel - God with Us	10
Life and Ministry	10
Crucifixion	10
Resurrection	11
Church	11
Transition	
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>11</b>
Good News	11
Call to Action	11
Hope for Eternity	
Hope for Now	
Worst Thing is Never the Last Thing	
Invitation	12
Closing Prayer	12

## **Luke 2:1-20, CEB**

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.) 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. 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!

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## **Introduction**

### **Sermon Starter Video**

Play sermon starter video.

### **Series Review**

During this season, we have the opportunity to find renewed hope and joy in the overwhelming love of God with us. We have been preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus once again, experience God's presence with us in Word and Spirit and anticipate Christ's return.

## 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.

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## Opening

### Hospital Visit

#### *Elevator Trip*

Two days ago, I was at Susan B. Allen to visit someone in the hospital. There was a man just in front of me on the way to the elevator. At first, I was disappointed. I thought, "I am going to miss the elevator and have to wait." But, I was in luck – the door opened again.

I walked into the elevator, grateful. I let him press the button for his floor.

He pressed "1". The doors opened again.

I said quietly, "We are already on the first floor."

He said, "Oh, right!" Then, as he pressed the button for the fourth floor and said, "I just had a baby!"

"Congratulations," I said.

As I stepped off the elevator and he continued up, I thought "How cool is that!" I reflected on what it would have been like for Mary and Joseph as they experienced the birth of their son on this night, so long ago.

#### *Neonatal Transport*

This morning, I was walking into the hospital again and saw an ambulance parked out front. Along the top, it said Wesley Medical Center. Underneath it was marked LifeWatch Neonatal Transport.

I have no idea about the circumstances that brought that ambulance to El Dorado. However, I still felt a sinking feeling – a family is having a very different Christmas Eve.



#### *Transition*

This is part of the reality of Christmas. We are gathered here tonight to hear the same story of the birth

of Christ that has been told in this sanctuary for 88 years and throughout the world for thousands of years.

Sometimes our lives seem very much the same from year to year.

Sometimes they change so much, so as to be unimaginable.

For some, the season seems magical, hopeful and bright.

For others, it is not at all magical.

This can be a crazy season, even if all is going well – gifts wrapped, travel plans, food cooked, pictures taken.

Where is the peace that the angels tell the shepherds about?

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## Tragedy, Loss and Darkness

Then, when we turn on the news we don't seem to find peace either. Looking back over 2015, we see headlines<sup>1</sup> of:

- Paris attacks and the growing threat of Isis
- Migrant crisis engulfs Europe
- Racial unrest over police killings roils U.S. cities
- Charleston church massacre
- Crash of Germanwings Flight 9525
- Mass shootings in San Bernadino, Louisiana, Orgegon, Colorado and other states

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 and loss and darkness?

How do we find light in the midst of darkness?

## 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Brandon Griggs, "The 15 stories that had you talking in 2015," December 23, 2015, accessed December 24, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/21/world/top-stories-year-talking-2015-feat/index.html>

### **Transition**

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

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## **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.

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## **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.

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*As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Now all of this took*



*place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:*

*Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son,  
And they will call him, Emmanuel.  
(Emmanuel means "God with us.")"<sup>2</sup>*

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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.

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## **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. You might own sheep, yet it was different if you were the one that was actually watching the sheep at night.

### **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.

### **Transition**

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

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## **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.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 1:20-23, CEB.

## 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:

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*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.  
On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.<sup>3</sup>*

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## 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.

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## 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 9:2, CEB.

## **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.  
This is the beginning.

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## **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 kingdom of the world [shall] become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and he will rule forever and always."<sup>4</sup>

And he shall reign forever and ever.

One day, [God] will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore..."<sup>5</sup> 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.

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<sup>4</sup> Revelation 11:15, CEB.

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 21:4, CEB.

### ***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.