

December 24, 2011  
Christmas Eve 9pm  
Rev. Jeong Park  
Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

Sometimes when we think about the Christmas story, we remember the birth of Jesus like a fairy tale, not as a real story to us. You may picture three wise men who wear nice robes and ride camels following the star to the stable/barn. You may even imagine a warm and bright barn with a cozy manger for the baby Jesus. They are paying homage to the baby Jesus with presenting their precious gifts to the new messiah. And shepherds ran here to see the New born king after they met angels on a field on that night. Angels flying like Tinker Bell in the story of Peter Pan have guided them to come here. We want to hear a real story of baby Jesus. What is the main point of our Christmas story?

Tonight, the birth we have been expecting has happened! I want to challenge you to imagine that this sanctuary is a real barn where Jesus was born, and here is the manger where the real baby Jesus is laid down, not a plastic doll Jesus. What do you want to see and what do you want to bring it back your home, your life after tonight? Are you ready to open your hearts and are your hearts willing to receive this message? This baby doesn't belong to Mary and Joseph, now it belongs to you! You may come and check out the new born baby with your curiosity, but you should realize that you are responsible for this new born baby. You cannot go home without taking this baby with you! (I am a new pastor to this church. One of church member made a joke to me: "now you are stuck here with us!") Like me, you may come from a spectator's point of view, but you are wrong: now you are stuck here with us!

As you notice, the wise men story is only recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Here, in the story of Luke, angels and shepherds are the main characters in our Christmas story. As we learned during the Advent, in both Hebrew and Greek the word of "angel" mean "messenger." Most often in the Bible, angels simply appear as people. In our story, several night-shift shepherds were watching their sheep when a stranger appeared among them. This alone might have frightened them that night, but the strangers were angels. They said to them: "Do not be afraid: for see-I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (2:10-11). Good news of great joy for all the people- this is what the birth of Jesus is.

I read a story between angels and God. The angels have seen terrible things on earth: war, violence, hatred between people to people and nation to nation, terrorist attacks, fear, worries and anxiety among people. The angel says, "Oh, God, please don't send me back to Earth again. It's terrible. What can I do with these people? Please don't make me go back again, please!...What? I don't have to go? You mean it? I don't have to go? Oh, thank you, God, thank you! What? What? You mean - you're going?!" God *is* here in this place. Someone has come to us in the darkness to show us that we are *not* alone. We are not alone to face the pain of the world. We are not alone to face the pain in our lives. There is one born to us in the night – bringing peace and hope, love and joy to our whole world. Tonight we celebrate the birth of every child, and the birth of one child in particular, the one who changes everything. In the birth of Christ, God comes to us just like a human being! God has a message too important to send by fax, email or even instant message. Instead, God comes in person. In this baby, in this man, Jesus, people touched the powerful reality of God's love, and it changed their lives. God adores us and brings us a love that changes everything. In this baby, we are given a message and a mission.

Never underestimate the power of a child. Children can go where none of us would dare. That's why God chose a child to bring the powerful message of God's love to the world. God knows the power of a child.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes describes how God's power is like the power of a child: "God does not come into our lives with overpowering force. God comes with no more power than a baby has: the power to evoke our love. God comes with no more authority than a crying child, the authority of one who knows suffering, and will not be fooled by empty comfort.... God does not come to holy places, to sanctuaries and temples, but to mangers and graveyards, shelters and tent cities, to broken places. God does not come to the triumphant and those in high places; God comes to shepherds and lepers, to the poor and the weak, and to you."

When you are willing, look.

(From "Baby in a Manger," Copyright © 2009 Steve Garnaas-Holmes  
unfoldinglight@hotmail.com)