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Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

*The Birth of the King*  
Matthew 1:1–17; John 1:1–5

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*series: The Story*

One of the ironies of modern history is that the majority of people who celebrate the Christmas holiday have never really got to the heart of the Christmas Story. We have heard the storyline, and many of us can name the characters in the story. We hear about Mary, Joseph, angels, shepherds, some wise men from the east, Caesar Augustus, Herod the King, and of course the infant Jesus.

At Christmas we think about these different characters in the story and try to figure out their importance. It reminds me of a story of some children who were cast in their nativity play and were trying to explain why their particular part was the most important to the story. Five-year-old Olivia was playing Mary and her best friend Claire was playing an angel in a nativity play their school. Before the show, a young boy was going around the dressing room repeating, "I'm a sheep, what are you?" Each child responded politely, including Claire, who proudly declared she was an angel.

The boy then turned to Olivia, still struggling into her costume with her mother's help, and repeated the question to her: "I'm a sheep, what are you?" Olivia simply said, "I'm Mary."

Realizing he was face to face with an important character, he felt he needed to justify his own role. "It's hard being a sheep, you know," he said with all the seriousness of a 5-year-old actor thinking he had an important part.

Five-year-old Olivia, with an equally serious response, was profound, innocent and not trying to be funny. She said, "Yes, it must be hard to be a sheep, but it's also hard being a virgin you know."

My first thought when I looked at our preaching calendar for The Story was, Hmm, Christmas in March. This could be awkward. Our community group is also going through The Story and we are going to embrace Christmas in March. We are planning to serve Christmas cookies at our next meeting!

Over the past six months we have walked through the first 21 chapters of The Story ending our study of the Old Testament last week. For the next 400 years it was as if God stopped His Story. No new prophets, no new kings, no new revelation, just the hope of a future king, a future deliverer, a messiah. Historians tell us that over these 400 years the Persian Empire declined. And under Alexander the Great we learn of the rise of the Greek Empire. Then we read about the decline of the Greek Empire and the rise of the Roman Empire.

But God's Story goes quiet until "the set time had fully come," as the Apostle Paul puts it. Finally, God speaks again, this time in the person of Jesus Christ. Let me try to illustrate what happened through the tragic story of a little boy named Martin Turgon.

A horrible accident took place June 5, 1978, when seven-year-old Martin Turgon slipped off a wharf and fell into the Prairie River in Canada. At least a dozen adults saw him struggling for a few moments before he sank and drowned. Why didn't anyone dive in to save him? Just upstream, a plant was dumping raw sewage directly into the river. The water was dirty and dangerous. So tragically nobody jumped in to save Martin Turgon.

It's not that hard at times for us to view God as one of the on-lookers standing on the wharf of the Prairie River. We feel like God looks at us flailing in the filth around us and then he says, "Look, I'm not diving into the mess of your life until you get out to the putrid river. I am a holy God, so you clean up your act first, and then I'll love, accept and embrace you."

But in Chapter 22 of The Story we are introduced to a God full of grace, who was willing and still is willing to plunge into the mess of human sin and sorrow. Today we meet a God who says, "Because you cannot get yourself out of the putrid river... because you can't clean yourself up... I'm coming after you... I'm coming into your world because I love you." I've heard it said, "That night in the manger in Bethlehem, God took the Christmas Plunge.

**"In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father full of grace and truth" (John 1:1–2, 14).**

The word for "word" that John uses is the Greek word *logos*. The word *logos* entered into our English language with words like logic and logical. Why would we begin a story about Jesus by calling Jesus the *logos*? Why not use the term Son? In the beginning was the son, and the Son was with God and the Son was God. Or begin with messiah, Lord or Lamb? John used *logos* because John wanted to reach the widest audience possible.

*Logos* struck a deep chord in every culture that John knew about. For the Greeks *logos* was a common word. *Logos* was defined as the rational integrating principle behind the universe that maintained all the natural laws, order, and life in the universe.

The rational integrating principle behind the universe had moved into the neighborhood and took up residence among us. Our Eternal God, the *logos* who was not bound by time or space, choose to enter time and space 2000 years ago in a tiny village outside of Jerusalem called Bethlehem. Jesus the God/Man became subject to the same physical laws that govern us, the same physical laws that govern the universe he spoke into existence.

John wanted us to realize that the *logos* was Mary's child with real flesh and blood and bone. The *logos* worked as a carpenter who got splinters, who even pounded his thumb on occasion. The creator who in the beginning spoke into existence the first hydrogen and oxygen atoms and brought them together to create the first water molecule was also Jesus who got so thirsty he had to asked a Samaritan woman for a drink of that water.

Matthew lays out with precision the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1. The last two verses of the genealogy summarize Matthew's work. The star of the story had come to our place.

### **Jesus Came to Our Place**

**"...and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah. Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah" (Matt. 1:16-17).**

We see some names and events that have already surfaced in The Story. We see Abraham, who, if you remember, God pulled aside one night as an old man with no children and told him that his descendants would outnumber the stars in the sky. And through his son Isaac and then through Isaac's son Jacob would be born Judah, and from that tribe of Judah would come a great king. For 14 more generations a nation was birthed, and sin remained an epidemic in her people and leaders. People cried out for a savior. Fourteen generations after Abraham came a man after God's own heart—David, a king of Judah. David was a great king but still a man of sin. Why could none of these kings get it right? Because sin was in the seed. Sin was in the DNA. Every person since Adam has disobeyed God because every person since Adam has the sin virus.

A dramatic consequence of this sin virus was the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. More generations passed. We read that the city of Jerusalem and the temple were eventually rebuilt. It wasn't as spectacular as the original, but there it stood. Fourteen generations came and went until we hear the names Joseph and Mary.

Matthew tells us that Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, and before they came together to consummate their marriage Mary became pregnant. Joseph was a good and kind man, and instead of having Mary publicly disgraced and punished, he had in his mind to divorce himself from her quietly. In the lower

story this was a scandal. But in the upper story it's the solution. Here's why.

**"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'" (Matt. 1:20-21).**

Mary will give birth to a son and he will save people from their sins. Paul, in his letter to the Philippian church said, "Jesus made himself nothing." God put skin on. He became touchable, approachable. The All-Present One confined himself to the womb of a 16-year-old virgin. The only All-Powerful One would make his way down the birth canal and be physically born, nursed, burped and changed. The All-Knowing One would learn to read, write and build furniture like his dad.

Jesus was and will always be the only human born without a sin nature. Why? Because the seed that brought about his conception didn't come from man, it came from God.

**"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')" (Matt. 1:22-23).**

The term theologians use to describe this miracle is incarnation. It means God became "one of us." Literally it means "in-fleshness." At Christmas we celebrate the "in-fleshness" of the Creator. Charles Wesley tried to describe this indescribable gift in the famous Christmas hymn he wrote in 1739, "Veiled in flesh the godhead see; Hail incarnate Deity. Pleased as man with us to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel."

The real story here? We humans have been granted unbelievable dignity. God did not become an eagle, a badger or a bear. God became human to reach humans. God so loved us he became us. So we have comfort in our suffering. The birth of the King expresses the empathy God has for us. He knows suffering, he knows injustice, he knows temptation, he knows physical pain, he knows rejection, he even knows loneliness. And He knows you. He understands you. So much so that he put all that is—his essence, love, grace, truth, body and spirit—into action. He not only came to our place, he came to take our place.

John 1:5 tells us that the Light shined in the darkness. That reminds us that we had better not misunderstand. The world reacted violently to Christ's coming. And it continues to react violently to him.

Bethlehem in Jesus' day was not "O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie." That is a lie. Bethlehem was a violent

and politically corrupt place. Soon after Jesus' birth the evil King Herod went through and slaughtered every baby boy under two years old. I was in Bethlehem five years ago. If Jesus was born 5 years ago, the shepherds and magi would have had to go through concrete barriers, barbed wire and pass by soldiers with M-16s to get to the baby Jesus.

The real story of Christmas is that we are in trouble and the only way out is a perfect plan executed perfectly for each of us in this room. The King Jesus came to our place so he can take our place.

### **Jesus Came to Take Our Place**

**"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).**

Jesus said, "Give me all your sin. In return I will give you all my righteousness. We will call it good." The currency he used to buy us back was his life. The curse on you and me, on all sinners, was placed on the sinless one. Every lash that he endured as the executioners flogged him we deserved to receive. This was judicial punishment for sin, the righteous wrath of a Holy God taking the penalty we deserved for our sins so that we could be declared not guilty. As he endured the flogging he was thinking about you and me. He was thinking, I will bear this suffering so that my children can go free. I will bear this suffering so that my children can have a relationship with me. The scripture says, "by his stripes we are healed."

Then he carried the cross to a place called Golgotha right outside the walls of Jerusalem. And there sinful men crucified him. The scripture tells us he was pierced for **our** transgressions and bruised for **our** iniquities.

The birth of the King tells us that God became fragile and breakable. God Almighty becomes someone we could hurt. No other world religion, Islam, Judaism or Eastern religions, taught that God became breakable or be willing to suffer to win us back.

There is a story in Numbers 21 of the people of Israel complaining to Moses about how God had freed them from Egyptian slavery, but then seemed to have abandoned them out in the desert because they had no bread, little water, and they were sick of manna. Finally, the Lord just had had enough and sent poisonous snakes into their camp and they bit people. The people then realized what they had done and confessed to Moses their sin against God. God then told Moses to make a bronze snake and nail it to a pole and lift that pole up before the people in the desert, and have the people look up at the snake and they will be healed.

**"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his one**

**and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-16).**

A Christian looks up and believes (demonstrates faith) in what Christ has for them. We ask God for forgiveness and we have forgiveness and life with him forever. Our God is a giver, not a taker. What does love do? Love gives. It gives gifts, indescribable gifts. Then God says enjoy the gifts. Enjoy your freedom from condemnation and guilt. Enjoy getting to know me better and realize my burden is light. Enjoy my real presence in your heart. Know the rush of surrendering your control in an area and watching me take control and steer to places of peace.

### **Jesus Invites Us Back to His Place**

At my house as a boy growing up my celebration of the birth of the King included one gift that was always the same year after year. My mom got a kick out of wrapping it. It was impossible to not know what it was. Every year I would snoop around under the tree and find this large perfect sphere wrapped with a bow on top. No, my mom wasn't giving me a globe for Christmas every year. I'm sure she would have wished that somehow I wore out a globe because I studied so much.

No, every year there was a beautifully wrapped fully inflated basketball. I would grab it, bounce it, and dribble this wrapped ball around the house, even throw her a bounce pass while she was making our dinner.

It wasn't even Christmas Day yet, but I was already in my heart and in my imagination enjoying the future pleasures I would fully enjoy when I was allowed to unwrap and fully experience that gift in my driveway. But I was certain what that gift was even though it was still wrapped. And you know what else? I knew it was mine. It had my name on it.

The birth of the King means that Christ has given us the gift of heaven. At this point it's still wrapped. But the package has your name and my name on it. Your name is not written on a tag. It's written in a book, a book Revelation refers to as the Lamb's Book of Life. I know it is waiting for me. Yet today I am enjoying the pleasures and security of that future gift. Jesus says to us:

**"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place that I am going" (John 14:1-4).**

The real heart of the Christmas Story? We have hope for the future. Because in that manger on that first Christmas Eve, God tied his future to our future. One day Bethlehem will be peaceful. We have certainty that one day we will be made whole.

When Mary's boy Jesus cried out from the cross, "It is finished," then it's finished. Battles continue but the war was won on that day 2000 years ago when the King was born, and then he lived, and then he died, and then he rose again.

Thanks Be to God for His Indescribable Gift!

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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