

# A Feast of Light

Part 5 of Sermon Series:  
*A Geography of Salvation*

a sermon based on  
Isaiah 9:2-7 & Luke 2:1-20

and delivered on  
December 24, 2019

Christmas Eve (Year A)

at  
Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

Copyright © 2019 Rev. Mark A Harkness

We're finally here. It's Christmas! Today is the day in which we recall that God came to dwell among us. It's good news. It's good news for all of us. It's good news for the world. It's good news for those of you who worship here every week, because tonight every song is a Christmas song. For those who don't come every week, it's such good news that you couldn't stay away. Right?

We preachers start to ponder our Christmas messages weeks before Christmas, even while we're working on other messages. We do that because we know it's important. It's a chance to share the gospel with people whom we don't see regularly for whatever reason: work schedules, living somewhere else, or just habit. What often happens is that we try to be too profound. I've fallen into that trap before: maybe I'll use the Christmas message to make a special point about some social issue or a point about faith. But I should be doing that throughout the year in the context of the gospel.

On the other hand there's an urge to bring something novel to the Christmas message, so that I don't hear, "Every Christmas it's the same thing." But when we think of the season leading up to Christmas, don't we do a lot of the same things? The Christmas tree – my guess is that most of you don't move it around each year. It has its spot. Right? Then there are the little traditions: maybe a trip to Cherry Vale to see the man in red, a drive around the neighborhood to see the decorations, or a stroll through the Nicholas Conservatory after a drive through Sinnissippi Park. Even our meals have certain invariable requirements. In my home, we can't have Christmas (Well, I could have Christmas it just wouldn't be very happy if my wife didn't get her Pillsbury Orange rolls. That's before we can open the presents.

In church, we hear from the same few Scriptures (one of two psalms, either Titus or Hebrews, one of two readings from Isaiah, and either the first chapter of St. John's account of the Gospel, or the birth narrative from St. Luke.) So what do we make of this?

What do we make of this story and this night in light of God's unfolding act of salvation? A few weeks ago I began a sermon series "The Geography of Salvation." It began with a reading from Isaiah 2:1-5, in which the prophet pointed to that day when the city of God would be visible on the highest mountain beckoning to all those who see it to come and receive salvation – to come find the perfect sense of wholeness that so often eludes us. That's been the goal – to reach that spiritual apex of complete and unending salvation. Of course there are challenges on the way. So most of what we as preachers get to preach is about preparing for it. Training for it. But tonight is different. Sort of? It's still preparation, but so much better.

I played football in high school. I was a little more fit back then. (Some of you may relate.) Each week the goal of the football team was to win. Towards that goal we had two-a-day practices in the weeks before school started. Then there was practice. I'm not sure why it was called "practice." On some days, we didn't really practice football at all. Instead we did weight training, ran laps in full gear, suicide sprints, and I don't know how many times up and down the bleachers. It was exhausting. Sometimes you wondered if it was all worth it.

But then the night before game day, was different. It was the pregame meal – an all-that-you-could eat bounty of pizza and pasta, mac and cheese. I'd go into a coma if I ate like that now; but because of the conditioning and the teenage metabolism, it was an important part of preparation. It restored the energy that we'd expended through the week. Muscle tissue was filled with glycogen, not only pumping them up but providing a ready store of energy for those bursts on game day.

The Feast of the Nativity – the Christ Mass – Christmas is that for us. "The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who have lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined." (Isa 9:2) Some of us have faced a tough year, maybe a tough decade. For some of us life has been filled with the usual ups and downs. For the fortunate few, the past year has been exceptionally joyful. But even success brings new challenges if not adversity. If that was all there was we'd be lost. Eventually, we'd collapse.

Tonight we are offered a feast – feast of light. Tonight we receive once again the good news that God chose to dwell among us – a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. More than that he chose to dwell among *US!* Ordinary people with ordinary vocations and ordinary lives.

Tonight we're reminded that although he was born in the hometown of a king, that that king – that ruddy young shepherd boy – wasn't an obvious choice except that he had a heart for the Lord. Tonight we're reminded that he wasn't born in a capitol city like Rome or Jerusalem, but that he was born among the normal folks of his family hometown. Tonight we are reminded that the angels called out not to the local civic leaders not even to the priests – but to the normal folk stuck working in a field at night.

Tonight we remember that an ordinary teenage girl became an extraordinary mother – not because of who she was but because Jesus came to us through her.

Tonight we remember that an ordinary carpenter became the extraordinary patron and defender of God himself, not because of who he was but because of his relationship with Jesus.

Tonight we remember that some ordinary shepherds got to bear an extraordinary witness to God's act of salvation because of their visit with that baby lying in feeding trough.

Tonight that great light shines upon you, that as the angels sing "Glory to God in the highest," it is you whom He favors and offers peace and possibility.

Enjoy the feast. Claim all of it. Seize each moment of joy that God offers you tonight and tomorrow. Don't hold back and don't be embarrassed. Don't think that you don't deserve it.

Put aside your troubles and worries and seize this moment of celebration. This is God's Christmas gift to you to prepare you and sustain you for tomorrow, the next day, and the day after that.

O come all you who are faithful and receive the joy he offers to you and the world. AMEN.