

Christmas Eve
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Merry Christmas everyone! For tonight we remember that Jesus Christ is born! Don't you just love everything about Christmas? The manger, and the shepherds, the humble mother, the shining star, and the wise men from afar. And there's the angel's singing, the cattle lowing, a little family gathered in the midnight air, the miracle of a baby born who would become king. And we have all the traditional carols, and warm feelings, love and peace and giving presents. Christmas cookies, colored lights, fancy ribbons, excited children, family gatherings. And there's Santa Claus who reminds us of a spirit of generosity and what wonderful gifts we each have, that we can share with one another, for even Santa will tell you that he is simply a humble servant who gives his life to serve his neighbor and his Lord and Savior Jesus.

There's much to love about Christmas and we could each add many special things to this list, many incredible stories, for this is Christmas. This is the time for which children have waited and adults have prepared, and we all rejoice to see Christmas come again.

But on the very first Christmas, things were not so complicated. There weren't that many people involved. And even though the heavens were celebrating like we can only imagine, the angel who announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds on the fields outside of Bethlehem, had a message of very few words. "Be not afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy, which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And like the humble nature of Jesus' birth, these simple, straight-forward words said everything that needed to be said.

Sometimes songs can do that really well. We all know the phrase "a picture is worth a thousand words", well sometimes a song can do that too, and in even more powerful ways. And every year some Christmas carol seems to attract my attention more than others, and this year the Christmas carol that's really been speaking to me is the carol, "Do you see what I see?" Compared to many of the Christmas carols, it's a pretty new one, written in 1962, that's only 57 years ago, so like the baby Jesus, it's only an infant.

But the story of the carol goes like this. It begins with the night wind, and the night wind sees what Christmas is all about. I love that in a story when something we don't assign any life to, like the wind, has a sense of understanding. It's like when Jesus was entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and Jesus said, If these people were not shouting hosannas and praise, the rocks themselves would stand up and shout! Anyway back to the story. The night wind sees what Christmas is about, so the night wind tells a little lamb, and then the little lamb sees what Christmas is all about, and goes and tells a shepherd boy. Then the little boy sees the meaning of Christmas, and so he doesn't hesitate to take it to the very top, he goes to the mighty king and says, "Do you know

what I know?" And then the king gets the meaning of Christmas and the king spreads the message too, he calls out to the people everywhere, and says "Listen to what I say!" Kings can do that, you know, when they talk, people listen, and he declares to all the world, "A child, a child, sleeping in the night, this child will bring us goodness and light!"

When we come to worship on Christmas Eve and look into the manger and see the Christ child, what do we see? Do we see just another baby of Jewish descent? Or perhaps we see Jesus, the grown man? What do we see? The father of the Christian religion, the enlightened man from the New Testament that teaches all the little children to be nice to each other?

Or...do we perceive that Jesus is...the very presence of God on earth?
Do we perceive that Jesus Christ is here in this room, all around us?
Do we perceive the presence of Christ with us and in us and around us at this moment?
Do we see that? Do we see that Jesus is the answer to all of our life's complexities and riddles and unsolvable problems?
Do we see who Jesus really is? Do we see that Jesus can revolutionize our lives and turn them upside down and pull the self-centeredness out of us, so we can finally love other people? Do we see that about him?

In the language of the New Testament which is Greek, there are two words for the word, to see. One is about sight, like ours, I see you. I see the Christmas tree. I see the smiles on your faces. But the second word for, to see, means to see deeply. It is not sight.... but more like insight.

Let me give you an example. When a sculptor begins creating a work of art, they start with a mound of clay or piece of rock, and at first that's what they see, they see the material, the clay, the rock. But then they begin to see INTO the material, and they see the possibility of what it could become. The famous sculptor Michelangelo once started a project with this enormous piece of granite, and he saw into the granite, and he saw the possibility of his most famous sculpture, the sculpture of David. So he saw this image of David, and began to chisel and work with his tools and by the time he was finished he had created this beautiful sculpture that stands in a cathedral in Florence, Italy, today.

The challenge for us...to really be able to see...is to see with depth and meaning.

When we came to church this evening, who did we see? Did we see some old friends that we have known for decades, or some new friends we've gotten to know in the past few years? Did we see some people we haven't seen in awhile?

Did we also see the children of God, the royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart to do the will of God? Did we see those people? Did we see the face of Christ on each other....God's people gathered to worship, so we could be sent out into the world in love? Do we see God's hands and feet and heart, living in the people we will share

the peace with, who have been called to transform the world and set it on fire with the love of Jesus.

And the words of that carol come back to mind, "Do you see what I see."

And when we come forward to receive Holy Communion, do we see a wafer of bread and a taste of wine to remember Jesus' last supper?

Or do we see..... that all our sins are truly forgiven? And that the sins of our husband, wife, children, family, and friends, that their sins are forgiven as well, so who are we to hold onto any of that? Do we see when we receive Holy Communion that God has forgiven our sins, and that maybe it's finally time for us to forgive ourselves as well, no matter how hard that may be to do.

Do you see what I see?

Probably the most anticipated part of our traditional Christmas, is opening our presents. And at the end of the exchanging of gifts, we sort of check out how we did this year. Let's see I got some socks and neckties and golf balls, and that one really expensive gift that we don't tell anyone about because we want to remain humble.....but in all the gift giving, do we see that underneath all the presents that are exchanged this year, is the gift of God himself to each of us. Underneath all the presents is a reminder that Christ is always a gift, never earned, never deserved, but always freely given in love.

Do you see what I see?

On this beautiful Christmas Eve night with all the cheerfully lit homes, and the lights dressing up our Christmas trees. And the candles that light up the sanctuary, it's beautiful. But on this sacred night, do we see the beauty of the lights?

Or do we see....that all the beautiful Christmas lights point to Jesus Christ, the light of the world? Jesus Christ is the guiding light in our lives. In a world of darkness and death, there is a light that cannot be overcome, a glorious light shining for all the world to see.

Tonight is a night of mystery and imagination, it is a night of redemption and inspiration. For tonight we celebrate that Jesus Christ is born to save us.

Said the night wind to the little lamb....
Do you see what I see?

Have a blessed Christmas. Amen.