

The With-Us God

On Sunday, we reminded ourselves of the core meaning of the biblical Christmas story.

1. Warm up question. What are your plans for Christmas?
2. Read Luke 2:8-18.
 - a. Why do you suppose the angel appeared to the shepherds, instead of other possible options (for example, religious leaders, government leaders, farmers, carpenters, etc.)?
 - b. Describe what you imagine the shepherds saw in vs. 9. Why do you think they were afraid?
 - c. Look again at verses 13-14. Describe what you imagine they saw and heard.
 - d. How do you imagine the shepherds felt when they entered a stable to find baby Jesus in a manger? What thoughts may have been running through their heads?
3. On Sunday, we focused our attention on verse 11, where the angel shares the “good news of great joy for all people.” The news was: “To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” First we focused on what it means to say the newborn child was “the Lord.” The word Luke uses there – *kyrios* – is the same term used by Jews at the time to translate the personal name of God – Yahweh. The idea seems to be that Yahweh came to us in human form as baby Jesus. Matthew makes a similar point when he says the newborn child will be called “with us God.” (Matthew 1:23.) The notion that God came to us in human form is called “Incarnation.”
 - a. To better understand the concept of Incarnation, Jeff invited each of us to imagine God offered you the opportunity to become a dog or cat for a year so you could see what that’s really like. Would you do it?
 - b. For those who say yes, what would motivate you to accept the offer? For those who say no, what would motivate you to turn down the offer?
 - c. How do you think the experience of being a cat or dog would affect you?
 - d. What do you think it felt like for Yahweh to become human?
 - e. Why do you think Yahweh wanted to become human?
4. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. What insights do you draw from this passage?
5. Jeff shared the story of State Trooper Precious Jones lying down on the floor to comfort and talk to a little boy at School 88 who was lying on the floor crying. The

photo of Officer Jones on the floor, wiping away the boy's tears and gently talking went viral. Jones said, "I decided to get on his level and talk to him. He started to cry so I wiped his tears and told him it'll be ok. As an adult, sometimes all we want is one person to stop, get on our level and maybe wipe our tears." What Officer Jones did there is an example of Incarnation.

- a. If Office Jones is an example of how God seeks to relate to us, what do we learn about God from her example?
 - b. In the back of your mind, do you tend to think you're serving an "Against-Us God" or a "With-Us God"? What causes you to think about God the way you do?
6. Christmas is not just about God's Incarnation empathy for us, because we need a lot more than empathy. It's one thing to say, "I understand your struggles," and quite another to say, "I can help you with your struggles." Jesus came to do both. So the angel didn't just describe Jesus as "Lord," she also described him as "Savior." Jesus came to save us from ourselves and our own worst tendencies.
- a. Proverbs 26:11 says, "As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool returns to his/her folly." What do you think that verse means?
 - b. Think about a difficult situation you've faced recently. If you had reacted to that situation in accordance with your own worst tendencies, how would you have reacted? Would that reaction have made things better?
7. Jesus came to us in human form, got down on our level, and showed us (by his words and example) a much more beautiful way to live. When we live in his way, we save our life, rather than losing it. But just because we know how we want to live doesn't mean we have the power to do it. That's why we need a Savior.
- a. The first two steps used by Twelve Step groups are: (1) I am helpless to help myself; and (2) I need my Higher Power. When in your life have you most experienced those truths?
 - b. Read John 1:12. As best you understand, how do we access the "power" promised in this verse? What do we have to do to get that power?
 - c. Leroy Elms gained power over his anger by meditating on scripture, praying, and asking for his wife's encouragement. Ruby Bridges gained spiritual power to face her oppressors with grace by meditation on the example of Jesus, prayer, and the encouragement of her parents. What kind of activities tend to increase the spiritual power into your life?

Christmas Schedule: On ***Christmas Eve***, everyone is invited to the home of Pastor Jeff and Pastor David (10838 Midnight Dr., Indianapolis) for a Church Family Open House from 1 to 8 pm. Christmas dinner will be served all day. On ***Christmas Sunday***, we'll hold brief worship services at church at our regular times – 9:30 and 11:00 am.