Advent 2017: “For Unto You”
Isaiah 9:2, 5-6; Luke 2:8-12

Before we get started, I would like to recognize and thank all those who made our Walk to the Manger weekend possible last Sunday! At Quivira, I would like to recognize Carolyn Unruh (at Wornall, Director Julie Fox) for her outstanding leadership as the director, as well as all of our cast members, musicians, tech teams, and those who worked so hard behind the scenes to make the story of Christmas come to life in a dramatic and powerful way!

I wanted you to know that together Colonial gave over $70,000 just to missions last week, including over $53,000 toward our local mission partner, Bobby Jo Reed and her ministry called The Healing House. In addition to the missions offering, you gave hundreds of physical gifts to children and families in need, and many gave generously in your support of Colonial’s ongoing ministries in Kansas City and throughout the world. Thank you Colonial…thank you, thank you, thank you! To God be the glory!

This morning we will return to our Advent Series entitled, “A Light Has Dawned.” Our texts this morning will come from Isaiah 9 and Luke 2. Please stand and let us read the Word of God together.

My message this morning will fall under four subheadings: 1) The humility of Christmas; 2) The shocking claims of Christmas; 3) The personal promise of Christmas; and 4) Three ways to respond to Christmas.

I. The shocking humility of Christmas

As we’ve seen in the first two messages of this series, the Bible is both aware and quite honest about the darkness that is real…both the darkness of evil in the world, and the darkness that we battle within ourselves. And yet, the Bible is full of promises that help is on the way for those of us…all of us…who walk in darkness. 800 years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah wrote these words through the power of the Holy Spirit: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has a light shined.”

Isaiah writes with so much conviction that his words are in the past tense, as though the event has already taken place, though we know he is actually pointing forward to a time when God would intervene in human history.

But how? How would God intervene? In what way would the Light come into the world to bring hope for those who walk in darkness?
The average Israelite in the 8th century BC could not help but assume the Light would come in the form of a mighty warrior, a Savior King who would descend from heaven with a raised sword and liberate Israel from all those who sought to overthrow them. From the time of Isaiah…for some 800 years…the Israelites clung to the hope that the Messiah…the Savior…a Mighty Warrior would come.

But did Isaiah say that a mighty warrior would come? No. Here’s what the Lord revealed to Isaiah, which he faithfully passed on to the suffering Israelites in Isaiah 7:14: “Therefore, the Lord shall give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

In our text from this morning, Isaiah tells of the light that has come into the darkness, and then he writes in 9:5, “For unto us a child is born; to us a son is given…”

The shocking humility of Christmas is that the long-awaited Messiah who will come to save the world will come as baby…a controversial baby…a son born to a virgin.

And of course, that is exactly what we see recorded in the first two chapters of Luke’s gospel: the virgin, Mary, conceives through the power of the Holy Spirit, and later, in the city of Bethlehem, as foretold by the prophet Micah (5:2), she gives birth to a son. In Luke 2 the messenger of God declares: “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people…you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

The shocking humility of Christmas is not only that the Savior of the world comes as a helpless baby, but that the Savior of the world comes as a baby born to an unwed mother who gives birth in an unsanitary setting of abject poverty. His first bed is a food trough, his first clothes are filthy rags, his first visitors are stinky shepherds, and the vast majority of the world’s population had no clue that the Savior of the world had just arrived.

Now…hold the shocking humility of Christmas in tension with the shocking claims of Christmas.

**II. The shocking claims of Christmas**

Look at Isaiah 9:5-7, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace…of his government, there will be no end.”
Look at Luke 2:11, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Christ (the Messiah)...the Lord!”

So here is the shocking claim of Christmas: the child born in a barn...the son born into poverty and shame...is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Which is to say in no uncertain terms: the one who now lies in a manger is God. God was just...born.

I know...that’s crazy, right? How could anyone believe such a fantastic story? Everyone knows that the Mighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, cannot possibly be “born” on planet earth. But make no mistake: that’s exactly what Christian doctrine maintains. Why? Because that’s exactly what Isaiah prophesied, and 800 years later, that’s exactly what happened.

But...that would mean that this baby, named Jesus, was both God and man...fully divine and fully human, right? Yes. That is what it means. We call this mystery the “incarnation.” The apostle John said it this way, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”

This is how the first century believers understood the mystery of the incarnation as recorded in Phillipians 2: “Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, [and was] born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Here’s how Paul describes Jesus in Colossians 1:15, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

The Apostle Peter refers to this child in the manger as “our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:1).

So...the humility of Christmas is that the Light who shines in the darkness comes as a child born to a peasant virgin, who is found by shepherds lying in a manger, wrapped in rags.

The shocking claim of Christmas is that this seemingly helpless child is none other than the Son of God, who is both fully God and fully human...He is the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Wonderful Counselor, and the Prince of Peace.
So how do we hold the humility of Christmas and the great claims of Christmas together and make any sense of that at all?

Look to John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave us His only begotten Son, that whosoever should believe in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The only way we can make any sense of Christmas at all is to understand just how much God loves us…the world…those who walk in darkness. Which is why the Gospel…and Christmas…is a promise and a truth that is deeply personal.

**The Personal Promise of Christmas**

When the angel made his announcement to the shepherds in Luke 2, it was not a general announcement. It was not a theological statement about how to maximize our lives or how best to be religious.

The angel came bearing news about what God had accomplished on our behalf…and it was personal. “For unto YOU is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!”

Most religions have a prophet or a guru who says, “Here is the way back to god!” It is a prescription for good behavior, rituals, and sacrifices that will hopefully appease the gods so that your crops will grow or you will be able to have children. But the angel does not come with a prescription…the angel comes with news: God has not forsaken us. God has not forgotten us. God has not walked away, dusted off His hands, and said, “I’m done.” Instead, God has come to us, as one of us…God is with us…and He has come to save us.

Even more personal than “God is with us,” is this bit of news: The child is born unto YOU. God came for YOU. And because God came for you as one like you, He understands you!

Tim Keller writes:

If God has really been born in a manger, then we have something that no other religion even claims to have. It’s a God who truly understands you, from the inside of your experience. There’s no other religion that says God has suffered, that God had to be courageous, that he knows what it is like to be abandoned by friends, to be crushed by injustice, to be tortured and die. Christmas shows he knows what you’re going through. When you talk to him, He understands.
You are poor? God was poor in Jesus— he was born into poverty, grew to be a man who lived in poverty, and he died as a homeless man who had nothing. You are suffering physically? Jesus suffered unthinkable pain in his body, including hunger and torture. You are suffering emotionally? Jesus suffered ultimate betrayal and heartbreak. He wept when his friend died; he lamented over the city He loved. You are suffering because God has not granted your deepest longing? Jesus asked God to spare Him the cross and was denied. You have suffered psychologically due to injustice? Jesus was falsely accused, whipped, betrayed by one friend and denied by his best friend, and was crucified though he was the most innocent man who ever lived. Jesus understands your pain…He is with you…and He Is God.

Can you see what it means that Jesus came as a baby, fully God and fully man? It means that our God, the God who created the heavens and the earth, now understands what it feels like to be a human being on planet earth. He understands our pain…He has lived it. He understands us more than we understand us…which is why Christmas is not frilly…it’s not silly…it’s not about presents and spending time with family and decorating trees (which are all fine, by the way—it’s just missing the point). Christmas is about a God who came down to find us, to be with us, to take on our darkness, to convince us that we are not alone, to die in our place and to show us that we are loved beyond our wildest imaginations. Christmas is personal…and it is beautiful. Dorothy Sayers, a British essayist and novelist once wrote:

The incarnation means that for whatever reason God chose to let us fall…to suffer, to be subject to sorrows and death—he has nonetheless had the honesty and courage to take his own medicine…He can exact nothing from man that he has not exacted from himself. He himself has gone through the whole of human experience—from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death…He was born in poverty and suffered infinite pain—all for us—and thought it well worth his while.

Which is why we simply cannot yawn and feebly acknowledge our belief that Jesus is the Son of God who came to save us on Christmas and then go on living our lives as though that truth is only mildly important. Nor can we summarily dismiss the Christmas Story as myth and legend.

Christmas is too humble to be dismissed, and too shocking to be boring. If the God of the universe humbled Himself to become a child born to a virgin in order to take on our darkness and rescue us from the cancer of sin that lives in us all, then we must respond!

**Three Ways to Respond to Christmas**
Historically, there are three different responses to Christmas: 1) fear; 2) anger; or 3) worship. Those who long to have control over their lives fear the good news of Christmas because Jesus, the One who gave His life for us, calls us to give over our lives to Him. Why? Because He has earned the right to be our King. He is God who became man, He is the lamb who was slain on our behalf, and He arose from the grave and conquered death. He is the Alpha and the Omega; He is our brother and our friend. However, we cannot add Him to our busy lives as a good luck charm or our genie in the bottle. Jesus said, “Anyone who wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” Grace is free, but we can no longer be the masters of our lives…Jesus is Lord. Tim Keller writes, “If the baby born at Christmas is the Mighty God, then you must serve him completely.”

That is petrifying for many people because they do not trust God to know what is best for their lives. They do not believe that God has their best interests in mind. And they do not yet believe that their sin has eternal consequences that will destroy their lives and relationships in this life and doom them to utter darkness in the next. They are afraid…of all the wrong things.

Fear is often the response of those who have much. In settings like ours it is common to hear people say, “I would place my trust and surrender my life to Jesus, but…I am very busy, I have a lot going on, I won’t be around because we’re going on a trip, I am needed in the office, my kids are my first priority, I’m not sure it’s really necessary to be that ‘serious’ about Jesus as long as I’m a good person and I do things to help others.” Their fear is based around the conviction that God wants something from them that will be too costly; rather than embracing that Jesus came because of what God wants FOR them. John writes, “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Jesus came that we might be born again as children of God…that we would walk in the light and be set free from the darkness. That we would not perish in our sins, but inherit eternal life.

However, as long as we are convinced that our current status is likely more convenient and comfortable than that which Christ offers us by coming to us as our Savior, Christmas will lead us to fear what faith would cost us. I would suggest that is like the cancer patient running from the surgeon out of fear that the surgery required to remove the tumor might hamper his golf swing. It doesn’t even make sense, right?

Then there are those who become angry at Christmas. They are offended by the mere notion that God would come as a baby to save the world. They have no room in their lives for weakness. They are also angry because “they don’t need a savior”…they feel justified in their own eyes.
They are angered by the notion of a Savior who extends forgiveness to those people who don’t deserve to be forgiven. Or they are angry because they once prayed to God for something that they truly believed was just and deserved, but God didn’t deliver, and they have never forgiven God. Christmas makes them angry because they are not willing to rethink the picture of God they have in their heads as a cold, removed deity who does nothing but disappoint—that is assuming He even exists at all. They are not willing to look upon the helpless child in a manger as the God who humbled Himself and made himself nothing…for us. They are not willing to look upon the bleeding, pierced body of Jesus on the cross and acknowledge that He died in our place. For to look upon the babe in a manger, or the Lamb upon that tree, would require them to admit that God’s love for us all is beyond debate.

Those who are angry at Christmas have yet not taken stock of their own darkness. Alas, there are many who cannot see their own darkness…they can only point out everyone else’s. They are mockers and scoffers; they have no fear of God, so they do not even recognize the evil that is slowly eating away at their souls. These are the Herod’s of the world. They would soon rather destroy Christmas than bow before the King of Glory. We all know those who are angry at Christmas…let us commit to pray that the Holy Spirit would reveal their darkness and His love in a way that they can see what is real and repent before it is too late.

And then there are those who respond to Christmas with grateful hearts and worship. Those who respond with worship are often those who have quit hiding…they know they need a savior.

In the past two weeks I’ve had the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel at City Union Mission (a homeless shelter for men) and the Healing House. In both instances, I was speaking to people who were very much aware of the darkness in them and around them. They were not hiding; they were not indignant; they were not distracted by their cell phones of their busy social calendars. They were broken; they knew it; and in large part they received the gospel with joy and gratitude in their hearts. Seven men prayed to receive Christ at City Union Mission, and those at the Healing House responded with deep appreciation and enthusiasm when the gospel was proclaimed.

For those who are not hiding, not distracted by the trivial pursuits of this world, and not filled with anger and self-righteousness…Christmas is nothing short of beautiful! It is good news! It is undeserved grace…it is the light that shines in the darkness!

Hear and believe the good news friends…unto you has been born a son…He is Christ the Lord…He is your Savior. How will you respond?

Will you pray with me?