

December 24, 2021
Christmas Eve

Luke 2

“It’s a Wrap“

When I was growing up – this was the night of opening gifts. My children never experienced that because Christmas Eve in a home with pastors is a night for church. But whether we open gifts on the 24th or the 25th - we have all put heroic time and effort into gifts for our celebration of this season.

I have never been good at wrapping gifts. My children would smile and say, “*Look, dad wrapped this one.*” But gifts are such an important part of Christmas – and I have been wrapping them for so long, *there has been improvement.* It was always a matter of too much paper on the ends of the package looking crumpled. This year, I discovered a way around that. I was wrapping a large package for my grand-daughter and calculated how much paper I needed to cover the large area of the top and bottom of the box. After cutting the carefully calculated piece I realized there would not be a crumple of paper this year – because there would be no paper at all. The top and bottom were taught and crisp. The ends were, well, not there. But I have years of experience. Without missing a beat, I got a different kind of paper – cut two pieces which fit over the ends and under the original piece and – Vioa! A bit of Christmas wrapping art under our tree.

Of course, in the middle of this artistic process my wife walked by and asked, “You have a problem there?” And with unearned confidence I said, “Nope.” She smiled and kept walking. When there is a lot of wrapping to be done you take whatever help you can get.

But I am feeling very “Christmassy” about all this. If we consider the texts we have heard read this evening, we have to wonder who was in charge of the planning. This is **the night of the divine entrance into creation to redeem it.** But the story doesn’t really shine in the way that description would lead us to believe it might. Have you ever seen the opening ceremonies for the Olympics? Have you ever attended a conference like the Presbyterian Association of Musicians worship and music conference which they plan for three years before it happens? Attention to detail, pageantry, and the best we have to offer are all on display.

But what about Christmas? “There were shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.” *No one with creative talent would start the show that way.* How on earth are we to think something important is happening when we open the curtain on people who are poor, of bad reputation and unable to follow any meaningful religious practice?

And who hired that angel? You know, the one who popped out of nowhere and scares the socks off the shepherds - and then says, “Don’t be afraid.” Really? You should have thought of that before you took three years off my life. Wouldn’t they expect if an angel shows up it must be bad news? Those abiding in the fields weren’t very religious.

The angel, seeing their fear was quick to add, *“I bring you good news of great joy for all people!”* Now, in the production meeting did anyone ask, *“Will this be an effective portal of communication?”* Will telling shepherds in the middle of nowhere get the word out?

To their credit the shepherds ignore the shocking nature of an angel speaking to them. They were ready to go when they were told, *“You will know you have it right when you find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloth and lying in a manger.”* Friends, who on earth would plan for God to come among us as a poor baby? A poor baby whose parents aren’t listed in anyone’s “who’s who.” Even with a heavenly choir, it stretches our ability to believe it.

The Christmas story is messy. It is **messy because of our expectations.** But Christmas *is effective* because God knows better than we that *substance is more important than flash.* God knows **the gift is more important than the wrapping.** Behold, I bring you surprising, good news of great joy for all people – so don’t be afraid.

Will my grand-daughter remember how her present was wrapped as soon as it has been opened? Not a chance. The gift lasts so much longer than the wrapping it came in. **We remember God’s gift this night** – including all the things that feel a bit like miscut wrapping paper. The gift of God’s very self was not meant to be *impressive* – but to tell us **God is on the move – we can set aside our fear – and discover life as it was meant to be.** God’s life is among us. It’s a wrap. Merry Christmas.