

The Way of Love
Christmas Eve at 11:00 p.m.
December 24, 2018
Pastor Andy Kinsey

“For God so loved the world, God gave...”

- **John 3:16**

Prayer of Preparation

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all God’s people! Amen!

Sermon Message

The weeks leading up to Christmas have, for all practical purposes, I think, gone well. As I look over what has taken place in the life of the church, I am grateful. Advent, I believe, has been good.

From the Shades of Blue Concert to the Cookie Walk to the Angel Tree to the Christmas Angels Store to the Christmas Cantata to Christmas Caroling to Delivery of Good Cheer Baskets to Helping Families to the Lighting of the Advent Candles – the season of waiting has been full of blessings.

I feel as if, at least on our part, we have planned, prepared, and waited. We have stressed the importance of opening our hearts and staying awake to what God’s Spirit is doing and to the way God is coming into the world.

At least on paper, Advent has revealed *the joy of sharing* with others.

I am thankful for all the ways we as a church have sought to engage in the reason for the season.

And yet, I also realize that the weeks of anticipation have now come to pass.

Whether we are ready or not, the angels are singing, and the shepherds are quaking, and the little Lord Jesus is sleeping on the hay in a manger, which means, that God *has already put into action* his daring plan to rescue this world! God’s action to redeem us has come to pass (Luke 2:1-8).¹

¹ I adapted parts of this sermon from Barbara Brown Taylor’s sermon “A Daring Plan” where she tells the story of God’s decision to rescue humanity; cf., Barbara Brown Taylor, *Bread of Angels* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1997, 31-35).

Glory to God in the highest! Jesus is born! Whether we are ready or not, whether we feel it or not, the angels are singing!

Indeed, I have always wondered what the angels may have thought on that first Christmas Eve when they heard about what God was planning to do in sending a baby to save a lost and sinful world, but I can only imagine the look of disbelief on the angles' faces when God set the plan into motion.²

I mean, the angels knew what had happened to the human race when Adam and Eve had gone astray in the Garden of Eden, and how they broke God's heart when they got together behind his back and hid from him, after disobeying what God had instructed them not to do: to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:18-25, Genesis 3:1-7). The angels had seen the consequences of what had taken place to the human race after that incident.

Remember that God had created human beings in his own image and he found himself falling in love with them, even to the point of walking in the garden with them in the cool of the evenings – but the attraction was not mutual (Genesis, 1:26, Genesis 2:5-25, Genesis 3:8).

Yes, God had made them, and God knew how they enjoyed the freedom God had given to them. And it is why it almost killed *God* to see what human beings could do to each other, and how they could – and often did – disobey, and how they could fight over all kinds of things (Genesis 3:1-15, Genesis 11:1-9).

And so, the angels were dumbfounded. They could *not* understand why God would go to such lengths to send a Child to redeem the world.

That's right! A Child!

After all, the angels realized time and again how we as human beings could act, and how busy we could become; and they knew how we could actually get to the point of *forgetting* about God altogether, using language that pushes God out of the picture completely, saying how we were “self-made” men and women, as if *that* were somehow a badge of honor, actually believing that we had created ourselves. The pride of it all!³

And so, we can only guess at how surprised the angels were to realize what God was about to do in sending a baby to persuade the world to return to him!

² Ibid., 33.

³ Ibid., 34.

Did God have safety features in place? What if the plan backfired? What was God going to do then?

The angels knew what the human race had done to God's good gifts over time: to creation, to other nations, to each other; and they knew how likely God's gift of a Child would be put at risk. After all, God was literally putting himself at the mercy of his creatures *by becoming one of them*. People could do anything they wanted to the Child.⁴

But God was determined! God was determined to send a regular baby into a sinful world to win back that world; that's how much God loved the world (John 3:16).

Yes, it was a *daring* plan, and the love to accomplish it was so abundant, so generous, so great, that even the angels had a hard time fathoming its depths (Ephesians 3:14-16; John 10:10).⁵

Who could?

But how else was God going to persuade us than by knowing our lives inside out, unless the Word became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14), unless God assumed our nature and became one of us, unless God took upon himself our faults, our weaknesses? For God knew that he could not save what he did not assume.⁶

In God's way of thinking, *this* is how the plan was to be put into action: *this* is how God would decide to get close to us again; *this* is how God would invite us to return to him: condescending to us and arriving in this world in the form of a baby, in the womb of a peasant girl named Mary, walking and teaching and, yes, dying, on this earth in Jesus (Luke 1:26-38).

No, it doesn't add up. But perhaps that's not the point. Rather, the point has to do with *who God is* and *how God acts*. The point is that *this* is how God chose to save us: *by becoming one of us*.

Call it a crazy kind of love, I know.

⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus made this point that what God does not assume God does not redeem; cf. David F. Watson, "On the Virginal Conception and Birth of Christ [Advent, Christmas, and the Miraculous, Part 2 (December 21, 2018)] at www.davidwatson.me

Call it risky, daring – Call it sacrificial, costly – Call it compassionate, vulnerable. Call it what you must, but call it for what it truly is – God in the flesh, God with us in a way that would reveal to us the power and mystery of the God who will draw to himself all creation (Matthew 1:23, 2 Corinthians 5:17).⁷

Indeed, the whole world! That’s Christmas in a nutshell, after all!

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

What kind of love? Self-giving love! The way of love at Christmas is self-giving.

Even in the face of all that is opposed to God! God continues to give and love. Even in the face of dishonesty, corruption, arrogance, strife and conflict. God continues to love! Assuming the status of an infant in a manger!

For that’s how God decided to carry out his rescue mission. That’s how God *acted* to deliver this messed up world from bondage: taking upon himself our lot, our fate, our sin.

To be sure, it was a daring plan. To penetrate the human heart always is. After all, we all build up defense mechanisms to hide what is really going on. As human beings, we have shown that our love for God is not always mutual.

And yet, God continues to love us.

No wonder the angels sang that night, “Glory to God in the highest!” Who would believe it!

So gentle. So mild. So *radical* in its intent and purpose: *the way of God’s love*. There, in a manger. The cry of a new born babe: the sound of our salvation. Listen and you will hear the angels sing!

Merry Christmas!

⁷ David F. Watson, “On the Virginal Conception and Birth of Christ [Advent, Christmas, and the Miraculous, Part 2 (December 21, 2018)] at www.davidfwatson.me.