

Christmas Eve Homily

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] Good evening again. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. And it's my joy to bring God's Word to you this evening. If you've been with us this month, you know that we are in the season of Advent, and that's a time when we focus on Jesus coming or arriving to the earth. And we've been asking this question, which is, how do we rejoice when it comes to Advent? We ask that question because for many of us, we've seen more Decembers than maybe we'd like to admit. And so there's this temptation for Advent to be a rote or routine, something that just washes over us. It's not new or fresh anymore, and I've given you this illustration of the difference between a commercial that plays over and over that we become tired of, and a cup of water that we need over and over because it gives us life.

Our hope is that Advent is like the water, not the commercial. And we've been answering that question all month. We're going to answer it again tonight briefly with two answers, which are two names that we've seen in our readings. One name was told by an angel to Joseph, and the other name was told by an angel to Mary. I'm going to go out of order, and we're going to start with Joseph first.

When we read our passage from the Gospel of Matthew, remember an angel is coming to Joseph to explain to him why Mary is pregnant. And this angel tells Joseph about Jesus' name. He says, they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. That's in Matthew chapter 1, verse 23. And of course, there's obvious ways in which God, Jesus is God with us. He lives as a human being. He experiences the frailty and frustrations of this world. We also have some concrete illustrations of that in these readings. We saw in Luke chapter 2, verse 1, that there's a registration. Now, registration is what you and I would call a census. Now, you have to think back a little bit. There's been a lot that's happened in 2020, but we also had a census this year. And so, Jesus experiences the everyday things that happen in our lives. This was a census that was ordered by a political ruler. We're told it was Caesar Augustus. The place of Jesus' birth was determined by the order of someone in government.

And we're told in chapter 2, verse 2, that this was while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And so, there are these geopolitical events that are going on, these political leaders that are telling people what to do. And Jesus' life is affected by those in the same way that our life is affected by those things. We're also told in Luke chapter 2, verse 7, that there was no place for him in the inn. We could put it this way. The local economy was overwhelmed by demand, and so there were shortages. We, of course, know what that's like. It wasn't necessarily a shortage in toilet paper at that time, but it was a shortage nonetheless. And so, the point is this. Jesus was not a stranger to the mundane frailty of this life.

Like us, Jesus was affected by geopolitical events, and he was affected by the decisions of rulers and leaders. God worked through Caesar Augustus, and he worked through Quirinius, and he is still at work through the leaders and the politics of this world. And so, we rejoice because Jesus is Emmanuel.

[3 : 35] Emmanuel. He's God with us. He doesn't know about this world just intellectually. He knows about it experientially. He knows it even better than we do. That's not the only name that we find for Jesus in these readings, though. It's not just that he's with us. It's also that he's above us. There's an angel that comes to Mary, and this angel also explains to her what's going on, and this angel gives Jesus a name as well. We see in Luke chapter 1 verses 32 and 33, the angel says this, He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. Of course, this is king. This is ruler language that we see here. He's going to have a throne, verse 32. He's going to reign, verse 33. He's going to have a kingdom, verse 33. And then, of course, there's this name. He will be called Son of the Most High. Jesus is not just a frail human who is with us. He is also the king of the world. He is coming, as we saw in verse, I believe, 33 here, that his kingdom will have no end. And so, these two names capture two things that are both true about

Jesus at the same time. He is with us, and he's also above us. We see that again in Luke chapter 2 verses 13 and 14. These angels show up, and they have something to say as well. They're praising God.

We're told it's a multitude of the heavenly host. In Greek, this is a word for an army. So, there's an army of angels with Jesus when he's born, and they're saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace among those with whom he is pleased. So, this great ruler comes with his army, and he comes with peace. Jesus is not just with us. He's above us. And so, the point for us is this.

Our hope is not in a new year. It's inconvenient to mention now, but if you think back all the way to the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, people were actually very excited about 2020.

There was lots of talk about 2020 vision and how this was going to be such a wonderful year for everyone, and yet it turned out to be very different, right? Because Jesus is not just with us, he's also above us. He's over us. We know that no matter what is happening, he is still the king.

[6 : 21] He is still in control of everything. He is greater and more powerful than the rulers of this world.

And so, our hope is also greater and more powerful than them as well. Our hope is not in a new year. Our hope is not in new rulers, but instead our hope is in the promise that we're going to look at soon in our series on 2 Peter. We see in 2 Peter 3, verse 13, that according to God's promise, we are waiting for new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Now, I've mentioned our readings from both Matthew and Luke, but of course, we also heard from John when the Callahan family read, and we saw this, John 1, verse 10. He was in the world, and the world was made through him. We see both God's with-us-ness and also his above-us-ness. He was in the world, he's with us, the world was also made through him, he's above us.

And so, what's wonderful and scandalous and praiseworthy about the Christian God is he's able to do both things at once. There are other gods that other people believe in, not real gods, but false gods, who can only do one of those things. There are gods who are with people, but they're not powerful.

There are gods who are powerful, but they're not with them. We worship the true God who is able to do both. Of course, John tells us something else in chapter 1. This joy that we have, this joy that we have because Jesus is both with us and above us, it is not joy. That's for everyone. We're told that there are people who reject him. John chapter 1, verse 11, 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. So, we see what it looks like to experience this joy. There's a receiving.

[8 : 28] To receive Jesus, of course, means that we have to believe in the reason that he came, and he came to save us from our sins. And so, we have to accept and confess that we are sinners in need of his mercy. We need a God who is with us and above us. Charles Spurgeon talks about faith as having three components to it. It's a component, first, of knowledge, that we know the facts about Christianity. We know that we're sinners in need of grace, and we know that Jesus came to save us from our sins. He was born to be with us and also to be sacrificed for us. It's not just enough to have knowledge, though. We actually have to have belief. We have to say that those things are true. And after that belief comes trust. We live as if those things are true. We live looking to grow more and more in holiness as God changes us and changes our lives. And we live in light of the hope that we have that Jesus has not just come in the past, but he's also come in the future. But for those who do receive him, those who do believe in his name, we can have great joy, no matter how many Decembers we have seen in our lives. We can have great joy because of Jesus' names. He is Emmanuel. He's God with us.

And he is also the Son of the Most High. He is God above us. So we can rejoice because God is with us and he is over us. We can rejoice because he is the baby in a manger and he's also the King of the earth. We can be filled with great hope and great joy because of our great God. So that's what we celebrate tonight and tomorrow. It's the birth and coming of our Lord. Please pray with me.

Dear Father in heaven, we thank you and praise you that your good news is never something that's stale, but it is something we need every day to give us life. I ask that that would be true of this community, those gathered now, even at a distance, that you would fill us with joy that comes from knowing that we have hope with a God who is with us and above us. We ask these things grateful that we don't have to earn them or deserve them, but we ask them in Jesus' name. Amen.