

LOVE **CAME DOWN**

Isaiah 7:14, St. Matthew 1:18-23

Christmas Eve 12/24/10

The Christmas spirit hit me this year when I was invited to tell the Christmas story to 60 2nd graders at Way Elementary School in Bloomfield Hills.

While there I heard this story. When one little 2nd grader was told about his new baby sister, he was not impressed. When he went to school the following day, his teacher remarked, "I hear you have a new member of your family." "Oh, yeah," he replied. "What's the matter?" his teacher asked.

"Aren't you happy to have a new sister?"

Page 2

He answered, "Yes, I guess. But there were a lot of things we needed more."

I am certain that when some people hear the Christmas story they think the world does not need another baby. How wrong they are!

Others have said that when God wants something done in this world God has a baby born. We know that was true of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

The prophet Isaiah said, "Behold a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called, 'Emmanuel' (which means, God is with us)."

We have gathered this evening to acknowledge the fulfillment of that prophecy. The Messiah has been born to Mary and Joseph in the little town of Bethlehem.

Page 3

It was in a stable that CHRIST was born. What a strange place for the nativity of the King of Kings. What plain and shabby surroundings for the birth of the Messiah.

I remember reading sometime back about a South Africa diamond miner who found one of the world's largest diamonds.

It was the size of a small lemon.

The miner needed to get the diamond safely to the company's office in London, so he sent it in a small steel box and hired four men to carry it.

Even when it was in the ship's safe en route, it was guarded day and night by at least two armed men. But when the package arrived at the company's office in London and was carefully opened, it contained no diamond.

Page 4

Rather it contained a lump of black coal. Three days later, the diamond arrived by ordinary parcel post in a plain package. The owner had assumed correctly that most people would not pay attention to an ordinary cardboard box.

Something like that took place that first Christmas. Who would think to look in a stable for the incarnate God?

Only a few star struck shepherds and some travel weary star gazers took note of what was happening in the tiny town of Bethlehem that night.

Why should the world take note? As far as we know, no one else heard the angels; no one else saw the star. The rest of the world saw only a plain, cardboard box.

Page 5

They could not know that box contained the advent of love into this strife torn world. No wonder that the blessed Mary has captured the imagination of so many of the world's people.

Mary is venerated by millions of Christians and Muslims because of the uniqueness of her son.

She knew that within the plain brown wrappings of a stable and a manger and shepherds and lowing cattle, that the world had been forever changed. How?

Songwriter Christina Rossetti put it most memorably, (in the hymn we just sang) "Love came down at Christmas, Love so lovely, so divine. Love came down at Christmas, Star and angel gave the sign."

Page 6

LOVE CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS. That is the message for tonight and all our tomorrows. Love was born in the manger in Bethlehem. What kind of love? All kinds.

First, LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.

Many of us are weary from shopping this time of year. We are trying to find just the right gift to say, I love you. Love made practical.

Christmas is that time of year when we try to say to our family and friends how much they mean to us. A gift may not be the best way.

And certainly gifts are given with many motivations in mind. But for most of us there is more joy in giving than receiving. We need this opportunity to express our feelings in a concrete way.

Hopefully, though, our love is not a narrow and exclusive thing.

Page 7

Christmas usually causes us to be more thoughtful about the needs of people we don't even know.

It causes us to be more mindful of the needs of those less fortunate.

A baby was left on the doorstep many years ago of a home in Georgetown, Pennsylvania.

A widow was the head of that home widow with several children to look after. But she took in that baby and loved it like her own.

In the evenings she would read great books to her children, and one of them, at least, developed a great taste for literature.

That baby abandoned on a doorstep was America's most prolific writer James Michener. (His 30 novels include Hawaii, Texas, and Space.)

Page 8

James Michener's life is a triumph of the unselfish love of that widowed mother.

That is the kind of love we celebrate this day love for one another love for those less fortunate.

BUT WE ALSO CELEBRATE ANOTHER KIND OF LOVE--OUR LOVE FOR THE CHRIST CHILD.

My family often goes to TN. for Christmas. I remember when our 22 year old daughter made her first trip as a baby. The car was all packed. The mail and the newspaper delivery had been stopped.

A neighbor would keep an eye on the house. All the gifts for relatives, aunts and cousins were somehow fitted into the trunk of the car.

We had plenty of anti-freeze in the radiator. Our suitcases and hanging clothes were in place. We were finally ready to go.

Page 9

I was ready to start out of the driveway, when all of a sudden we realized, "we've forgotten the baby." It was true.

In all the excitement and the grabbing up of luggage and Christmas gifts, we had forgotten our most precious cargo our baby daughter.

You can forget the baby, too, if you're not careful. That's easy to do this time of year. We see visual reminders "Don't leave Christ out of Christmas." And we try to keep that from happening.

He IS the reason for the season, as the slogan goes.

What can we offer the Christ Child this night? Nothing! After all, what can we offer him? Christ already reigns over all creation. What can we bring? Only our love and adoration. We do that gladly.

Page 10

We offer to Christ our love.

BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THIS CHRISTMAS IS NOT OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER, NOR EVEN OUR LOVE FOR CHRIST.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS GOD'S LOVE FOR US AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE BIRTH OF **GOD'S** SON.

Here is how God's love came to me this Christmas. Remember I mentioned speaking to all the 2 graders at Way Elementary Public School?

I was invited to tell the Christmas Story as Christian history and tradition. Our neighbors of other religions were given the same invitation.

I brought the Church's beautiful Nativity set that is sitting on our altar and window sills. I told the story and answered questions.

Page 11

I could tell right away which children went to Sunday school and which did not.

When we were through I went over to talk with my wife.

One little boy in her class came over, wrapped his arms around my waist and said: "Thank you."

I asked him what his religion was and what holiday traditions he would be celebrating. He answered, "We have no religion, but I liked your story."

Who cannot like the story of a baby? Remember we all use to be one.

Christians have a story to tell of a baby that brought love into the world. We celebrate that love on this night. Love for one another. Love for the Christ child.

And, most of all, the Source of that love God's love for us. Amen!

