

Christmas Eve 2017 – 7:00 and 9:00 pm

Christmas Eve. For many, this is one of the most joyful nights of the year. Being with family and friends, the music, the beauty, the worship. And this night especially, we enjoy the calm and peace of this holy place, because in the past few months, it seems that our world has been anything but calm and peaceful. We've witnessed mass shootings – even in a church, hurricanes, wildfires, threats from North Korea, the opioid epidemic, sexual harassment charges, refugee crisis, political tensions and more. And we yearn for change, for hope, for peace on earth. And so we come here tonight, Christmas Eve, for two reasons. One, so we can set ourselves apart from the chaos and confusion of the world around us. so that we can experience the holy, the sacred. And two, because deep down, we want to believe that the Christ child we worship tonight really can make a difference in our lives and in our world. We want to believe that the Prince of Peace will indeed bring peace to all the troubling situations that surround us. We come with the anticipation that his light can and will overcome the darkness. We come to listen to the story of his birth once again.

As we hear the Christmas story, there are probably many difficult images and thoughts that run through our minds – an unwed girl with child, an unjust government edict, a long exhausting journey, a cold night, no room at the inn, a child born in a manger, and poor shepherds and rich kings drawn to a stable in the middle of nowhere. Yet interspersed among all these happenings are visions of the divine. Appearances of archangels, choirs of heavenly hosts praising God, a sacred star. The holy in the midst of it all. And that is the essence of Christmas. You see, Christ came into a world full of trouble, poverty, violence, suffering and government oppression. And he did it so that he could both share in these experiences, and then to show us how to overcome them. He came to walk in our shoes, and give us hope. He came, in his own words, "So that you might have life, and have it abundantly." And he did it because he loves us. Each and every one of us.

A few years ago, I had the fortune to go to the Holy Land to see for myself where Jesus was born, and where he taught and lived and died. I met Palestinian Christians and Muslims and Israeli Jews, and they were all people just like us that yearn for peace. Being there gave me a different perspective both on the Bible and the world. So I want to share with you a video from those living in Bethlehem today, talking about who Jesus was and why he came.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=264&v=bjQDI95t0cU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=264&v=bjQDI95t0cU)

Yes, maybe there's significance in the fact that Christ was born in the most troubled place in the world... in poverty, to a woman who had to overcome so many obstacles, who's family became refugees, and yet, through it all, had hope and trust in God Almighty. Yes, maybe there's significance that the Prince of Peace and love was born in Bethlehem. And if we have that same hope and trust, just imagine what Christ can do in our lives as well.

Let us hear once again his story.