

The Rev. Joel Petruschke  
Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
Christmas Eve  
December 24, 2022

Many, many years ago, after God had created the heavens and the earth, at which time man and woman were formed in God's own image...

13.8 billion years after the Big Bang, according to astrophysicists...

Long after the great flood, when God had set the rainbow in the clouds as a sign of the covenant...

Twenty-one centuries from the time of Abraham and Sarah...

Thirteen centuries after Moses led God's people to freedom from enslavement in Egypt...

Eleven centuries after the time of Ruth and the Judges...

A thousand years after the anointing of David as King of Israel...

300 years before Emperor Constantine would declare Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire...

A thousand years before the Great Schism which divided the Church into Orthodox in the East and Roman in the West...

Fifteen hundred years before an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther would transform Christendom, and the dawn of the Protestant Reformation would emerge...

Nineteen hundred and some years before humans would walk on the moon...

In the 194<sup>th</sup> Olympiad...

In the 752<sup>nd</sup> year from the founding of Rome...

In the 27<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Emperor Augustus...

The birth of Jesus Christ took place in the city of Bethlehem of Judea.

And hardly anyone was there to witness it.

Mary and Joseph were there of course.

And a few shepherds stopped by to see the baby.

And yes, angels gazed down from heaven to behold the event.

And there were some farm animals looking on, maybe, maybe not.

Perhaps, the animals were too busy chewing their cud or were too busy bedding down in the hay for the night to take notice.

Who knows for sure?

And yes, wise men from the East we are told made the long trek to see Jesus, but according to tradition, they arrived a little later.

But, aside from these few participants, this most auspicious, pivotal moment in history for the most part went completely unnoticed.

PAUSE

But today on our contemporary timeline the birth of Christ occupies the place of paramount importance, doesn't it?

We describe historical events as B.C., "before Christ," or A.D. *anno domini*, "in the year of the Lord."

Of course, academics tend to be more politically correct and use B.C.E. "before the common era" and C.E. "common era."

And truth be told, Jesus Christ was probably born in the year 4 B.C., not at year zero.

The ancient monk who developed our Gregorian calendar, got it a little off.

But the point remains, we describe historical events in relation to the birth of Jesus.

Jesus' birth occupies the paramount place of importance in history.

But why? Why did humanity at the time of Pope Gregory 13<sup>th</sup> decide to re-fashion time so that history revolved around the birth of Jesus?

Our immediate answer is that Jesus' birth is highly significant, because Jesus is the Savior of the world.

His birth ushered in salvation, because Jesus had come to die on the cross and be born again, and through Jesus then we have the hope of redemption from sin and death, and we have the promise of new life.

Jesus is the Savior of the world, and thus humanity SHOULD and indeed DOES acknowledge that truth by use of the Gregorian calendar.

That is why Jesus then gets that notable place on history's timeline.

PAUSE

But, dare I say, there was something even more profound I think going on at that point in history, long, long ago, something even more profound than the birth of Jesus.

There was actually something going on outside of history, outside of time.

There was something happening beyond our perception, beyond what our eyes can see.

You see, somewhere out there behind the veil that is our cosmos, somewhere in the very recesses of God's heart, somewhere out there, beyond our view, at the time of Christmas, there was something so extraordinary...

And that something is that God chose love.

God the Creator, God the Almighty, our Omnipotent, Omniscient God chose love.

And this is really what Christmas is all about.

Yes, Christmas is about the birth of a Savior.

Yes, Christmas is about the salvation of humanity and the redemption of the world, through the birth of a Savior.

But even before Christ was born, even before Mary gave birth to her baby, that which in fact puts the birth of Jesus into motion happened...and that which took place, setting everything in motion, is this truth that God chose love.

This after all was the message that Mary received from the angel Gabriel when she was told that she would conceive and bear and child.

In effect, the message that Gabriel conveyed to Mary was this: “God chose love” and so God is going to bring forth a baby from you, Mary, for the sake of the world.

PAUSE

Now, granted God had been choosing love from the dawn of creation.

God had created the cosmos because God wished to express God’s love.

Think of a child who colors a picture or paints an image and then can’t wait to show that artwork to his or her parents.

That child is moved by love to create, like God chooses love and so then creates.

God chose love when God created.

Yes, to be sure, God has chosen love throughout the course of history.

God chose love when God established his covenant with Father Abraham and promised to make of him a great nation.

And God again chose love when Israel was given a deliverer in the person of Moses to lead God’s people out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land.

And again, God chose love when God created the institution of the Church at the time of Pentecost, when God gave God’s people the Holy Spirit.

God has chosen love over and over again throughout history.

But, what was TRULY REMARKABLE about God choosing love at the time of Christmas...

What set that moment in time at Christmas apart from all those other times where God chose love is this.

At Christmas, God pulls back the veil on the cosmos.

And God himself steps into history for all the world to see the very heart, the very person of God’s self.

Yes, Jesus Christ is the visible image of God’s heart for all to see.

In Jesus Christ, we see the workings of God’s heart on the stage of history.

In short, Jesus Christ is God's heart.

And what do we see?

What do we see, but that God's heart seeks to bring solace to those who grieve.

God's heart seeks to bring healing to those who are infirmed.

Seeks to bring hope to those who despair.

To bring reconciliation to those who are estranged.

To bring peace to those who are troubled.

To bring comfort to those who are lonely.

To bring faith to those who doubt.

To bring light to those who sit in darkness.

To bring joy to those who linger in sadness.

To bring forgiveness to those who abide in guilt and shame.

And to bring life and resurrection to those who abound in death.

Yes, the celebration that is this holiday, the celebration that is Christmas is about the heart of God made visible to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

This is what we witness at Christmas—the heart of God in the person of Jesus Christ, stepping out onto history's stage.

PAUSE

But that is only part of the good news we celebrate, Friends, tonight.

That is only part of the good news.

For you see God's heart was revealed, was made visible, not just long ago in a stable in Bethlehem.

The heart of God was revealed not just at year zero, or 4 B.C.

No, the heart of God is also revealed NOW in God's people, you and me, we who are the church, we who are the body of Christ.

Yes, we are God's heart. Yes, we are part of the great Christmas event, too, whenever we on history's stage chose love.

PAUSE

So, in the 246<sup>th</sup> year since the founding of the United States...

77 years since the World War II.

74 years since the United Nations adopted the Declaration of Human Rights, abolishing slavery internationally...

33 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Iron Curtain.

When the International Space Station was circling in Low Earth Orbit around the planet...

When President Joe Biden governed from the White House in the second year of his term...

When Vladimir Putin ruled in Russia, and Xi Jinping ruled China...

In the year, when Argentina became champions at the World Cup of Soccer...

In this time, even NOW, God chooses love again.

God chooses love when we, you and me, make room for the Spirit of God to enter us...

And when we make room for the Spirit of God to empower us, such that we then set about serving as God's agents of God's grace...

When we share God's love...

When we show compassion...

When we embody kindness and generosity...

When we bless others...

When we offer hospitality...

When we give of our time, our energy, and of our resources...

When we forgive, when we reconcile with others, when we chose love...

Whenever, and wherever we chose love, well, then Christ is born again into the world onto the stage of history.

When we choose love, that is Christmas, because that is the message of Christmas—choosing love, and making love visible, as God's self has been made visible.

PAUSE

God chose love on that first Christmas long, long ago.

God chose love and Christ was born, and the heart of God which had been hidden behind the veil of the cosmos suddenly was visible in the person of Jesus.

And God stepped out onto the stage. God entered history.

And God has been choosing love ever since, revealing God's heart to the world through His people, you and me, whenever and wherever we continue to embody the grace of God.

So even this year, today, at this very hour, it is a pivotal time history, like year zero on the Gregorian calendar.

It is a pivotal time because God appears on stage through us.

Thanks be to God. And merry Christmas to you all.