



Expecting
an Encounter
with the Lord

A Christmas Story You Have Not Heard!

On behalf of Faith Christian Community, I welcome you to this worship service. As the beautiful...snow fell on December 1st...I could not help but think of the amazingly, powerful song King David wrote during one of the most difficult times in his life...a difficult time because of choices he had made!

You usually do not begin a sermon this way...but the snow on Thursday was so beautiful I could not help but consider this verse as we think about Jesus...and His birth...and Bethlehem...and Mary and Joseph...and Shepherds...and Wisemen...and Angels...and a stable.

King David wrote:

***Have mercy on me, O God, according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.
(Psalms 51:1-2)***

***“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be WHITER THAN SNOW”
(Psalm 51:7)***

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain m.”

(Psalms 51:10-12)

“My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.”

(Psalms 51:17)

The context for this powerful Psalm (Psalm 51) was a choice King David had made...when he chose to commit adultery with Bathsheba. It was the low moment of his life. It was a choice that followed him for the rest of his days. And as you read the Psalms...the Psalms written after this choice of his...show a heart...a passion for the Lord...a sense of the true picture he was living...and the content and the tenor of the Psalms changes dramatically...once he dealt with himself in the choices that he made.

That story is a cosmic picture of why Jesus willingly chose to come to the side of humanity...for the sake of humanity...for the salvation of humanity!

The Christmas Story actually begins way before Bethlehem...and a manger...and Mary and Joseph. The STORY actually begins in eternity...in a conversation that Jesus had with Himself...and with God...His Father.

The story of Jesus is so powerful...and I want it to be the setting for all that you do...that I do...that we all do...in celebrating the birth of Jesus this year...2016.

Philippians 2:6-11

(Read all of these verses)

(The words will be on the screen.)

Here are a couple of verses I want to highlight:

“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage”

Philippians 2:6

Jesus...the picture and testimony of total humility...of a heart and mindset that considered others before Himself. This was not about HIM! He did not use His position for “advantage” for anything at any time.

“...rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

Philippians 2:7

“RATHER...” What a powerful word...for an amazing decision...for an incredible God! Jesus...made the decision...“rather” by ***“...making himself nothing...by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness....”***

The distinction was between ***“being in very nature God”*** to ***“being a servant”***...no...even less than that...***“being made in human likeness....”***

Philippians 2:7

- Originally...He was “God”
- But in the decision that He made...He...“poured Himself out...”
- Poured out...from “being God” ...to “being a servant...” ...no...even less than that...“being made in human likeness.”
- You see...we think as humans...that we are pretty hot stuff! On the pecking order of “life” we are at the top of the food chain.
- But the reality is this! In actuality...we are that *servant...that human!*

In one huge move...the author...the Apostle Paul...who wrote the Book of Philippians...goes directly from the heavenly scene of what Jesus did as He chose to come to the planet from heaven...to the earth...and let me read that powerful verse to you once again!

“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death...even death on a cross!”

Philippians 2:8

Talk about a transition! Talk about a change! Talk about high powered drama!

- “In very nature God....” (2:6)

- To..."found in appearance as a man..."
- To..."**he (himself) humbled himself**" (2:8)
- **"...by becoming obedient to death...even death on a cross!!** (2:8)

This story is not usually told at Christmas time. We marvel at the scene in the barn...at the actual birth of Jesus...at the story of the angels...at the appearance of the shepherds and the wisemen...and rightfully so because the story is so huge...so over powering...so encompassing!

But in this little book of Philippians...this is the "back story..." This is the drama behind the curtains of Bethlehem. These story lines are encased in the foundation of Joseph and Mary...and their long...painful trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem so that they could be counted in the Roman Census! And all of a sudden the bits and pieces begin to come together. The story of the physical birth of Jesus begins to take shape. But we cannot rush anything...because the story continues "**from humbling himself to the obedience that led him to death on a cross!**" (2:8)

For whatever reason Paul literally flies past the actual Bethlehem birth story of Jesus...past Mary and Joseph...past barns and animals and angels and shepherds and wisemen...and the three year ministry of Jesus...past the 12 Apostles...past the stories of miracles and parables...past the seasons of quietness and prayer...and straight to the cross and death. And what did Paul write by the power of the Holy Spirit...here in this book?

***"THEREFORE...God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name."
Philippians 2:9***

The "THEREFORE'S" in the Bible are pretty important.

In this story of Jesus...this Therefore is based on what Jesus did for humanity:

- He made himself as nothing
- He took on the nature of a servant
- He was made in human likeness
- He appeared as a man
- He humbled himself
- He became obedient to death...death on a cross

BASED ON ALL OF THAT...FOUNDED ON WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID...AS A RESULT OF THIS ACTION ON THE PART OF JESUS CHRIST...

"THEREFORE"
(Philippians 2:9)

God exalted Him...that is to honor Him
But even more than that...God exalted Him to THE HIGHEST PLACE (Philippians 2:9)

And what is the end result?

"...and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
(Philippians 2:9-11)

The two are connected together...the former story and life of Jesus...as that eternal story in heaven is connected to the birth story of Jesus in Bethlehem!

Allow me to repeat that again: ***The "therefore"*** is huge! What Jesus chose to do originally...to make Himself as nothing (2:7) is eternally connected to the birth story of Bethlehem...and ultimately...to that moment in time...in the future...in eternity...**"...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth...and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord...to the glory of God the Father!" (Philippians 2:9-11)**

Now you just might be thinking a handful of thoughts right now!

- Hmm...what does this all mean to me in 2016?
- Or you might ponder this thought: "What happened in the conversation between God the Father and Jesus the Son...in heaven?"
- And then again you might think..."OK...why have I never heard this portion of the story quite like this before...especially when it comes to the Christmas story?"

My initial response would be that this “song” that the early church sang...as recorded by Paul here in Philippians, just does not receive the press that the Bethlehem accounts of the birth of Jesus have received and how they have been highlighted over the years. And yet this Philippians story is crucial to understanding and accepting the Bethlehem story. This insight into the heavenly councils of God is simply over the top...good! And...this account adds amazing credibility to the Bethlehem story and gives it such rich depth and meaning.

But there are even deeper implications. Paul wrote these words for a purpose. He was trying to help the Philippian Church understand the bigger picture of what it meant to be totally committed and dedicated to Jesus Christ. And so the Holy Spirit...triggered this response in Paul’s heart. Look at how this story of Jesus “*...humbling Himself...*” actually begins!

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset (or, attitude) as Christ Jesus!”

Philippians 2:5

The church in Philippi was going through some hard times. All you need to do is read the first chapter of this little book. We are not actually going to do that but let me just highlight a few of those identified difficult lines:

- “It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry” (Philippians 1:15)
- “Some preach Christ out of selfish ambition...” (Philippians 1:17)
- “Some preach Christ out of ***insincerity***...supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains...” (Philippians 1:17)
- But then Paul gives this resounding declaration: **“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”** (Philippians 1:27)

So to make sure that they understand...and that we understand...he uses another THEREFORE! (Philippians 2:1)

Philippians 2:1-4

The Lord wanted Paul to set the tone...for what was going to be happening! And he uses another THEREFORE! (2:1)

These four verses set the tone for any follower of Jesus Christ...and for any church...following Jesus Christ.

And that is when he gets to the whole relationship story!

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus!”

(Philippians 2:5)

So...then...Jesus has been established as the Standard! We can never lose sight of that!

- Yes...we honor his birth in Bethlehem
- Yes...His ministry was simply over the top
- And yes again...His death on a cross...His burial...His resurrection...His ascension...His return...are all powerful...transformational...life changing!

And the application is: ***“In your relationships with one another...have the same mindset as Christ Jesus!” (Philippians 2:5)***

And that is where the challenge enters the picture!

- That involves my relationship to you...and you...and you
- And the challenge is...to have the same mindset...or the same attitude as Christ Jesus.
- ***That is the standard...Jesus***
- ***He is the benchmark***
- ***He is the story***

What I do...how I do it...who I do it to...who I do it with...what I say...how I react...everything must match up to ***the demonstrated attitude and mindset of Jesus Christ.***

Have I ever said to myself: “But Lord...you do not understand...?”

Or..."I have a RIGHT to be this way..."

Or..."You should have seen what they did to me..."

Or..."**and you fill in the blank...**"

This Christmas Season...as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ...my argumentation for my RIGHTS is pretty shallow...my defense is pretty paltry...as we say so many times..."**I do not have a leg to stand on!**"

How can I justify my "rights" when I read these words about Jesus Christ?

How can I rationalize my actions...or reactions...that would be contrary to the heart and life and teachings of Jesus...when I understand all of these truths about Jesus Christ...and how they apply to me?

"HAVE THE SAME ATTITUDE AS CHRIST JESUS!" (Philippians 2:5)

In this month of December 2016...this is the best gift you can give...

- To yourself
- To your immediate family
- To your friends
- And finally...and foremost...**to the Lord...because it then is a recognition and affirmation that His ways are really pure and true...and that His heart is really for you...and that His teachings and His life example have really impacted your life for eternity!**

That is YOUR GIFT...you have received from the Lord...and now give out daily...freely...THEREFORE...because of Jesus living in you fully and completely!