

Christmas Eve – Luke 2:1-20
Dec. 24, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Merry Christmas!

Tonight we are gathered in the darkness to remember that Jesus Christ, the light of the world, was born into darkness.

Jesus wasn't born at high noon. He was born after sunset, in the darkness, where people stumble, as a reminder that God's love is stronger than sin. God knows we stumble, but God doesn't leave us there in the dark.

God gifts us with God's light, and that light, the light of all people, bursts into the darkness to proclaim that darkness has no power over our relationship with God.

Jesus Christ, the light, is born into darkness and the darkness did not overcome him. The darkness did not overcome him. That's what we celebrate in the darkness of Christmas Eve.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Joseph is told to name Mary's child Jesus. Name him Jesus, because he will save the people from their sin. That's how we usually hear it, right?

But, another way to translate *save* is *heal*. Name him Jesus, because he will heal the people of their sin. Heal. I actually like that translation better.

In Christ, we are healed of our sin. In Christ, we are healed of guilt, shame, embarrassment, unworthiness, resentment, pain, and rejection. We are healed by God coming to be one with us.

Being saved from sin makes it sound like – well you are sinners, but you don't have to worry about going to hell anymore, so mazel tov.

But to be healed of our sin puts a colon where a period has been. You are saved from your sin. Period. You are healed from your sin: Colon.

The colon implies that there is more to follow. You are healed of your sin, now go out into the world and bring healing into it.

The colon is open ended and each of us will respond differently based on who we are. You are healed. Now what will you do? What will follow? How will you live the light in all of the dark places of this world?

Because the light lives in you, how will you live differently in the world.

Saved implies that you can just keep going on as you always have, but healed means that we are set free to be bold in the world. Healed we bring healing.

Tonight we will light candles as we read the gospel of John. The lighting will start here with the light on the altar, the light from the place where we receive Holy Communion, the place where we ingest the light. Holy Communion is like a booster shot of light.

From that one candle the light will pass to each of us. Healing passes from one person to another, hence God coming to us in the flesh.

Tonight we will be blessed with the candles that are lighted here and you are encouraged to take the light, if you dare, literally out into the world. Or at least take the candle that bears the light with you.

Yes – take the candle with you, but please leave the holders behind.

Tonight we remember that healing starts with Christ and then passes from person to person. The good news starts with God as a human baby and then passes through each of us to one another. God came in the flesh, because God is relational, and healing comes through loving relationships.

So, the light passes from one person to another. Healing is shared person to person, and it is infinite. It goes on forever and ever. Healing comes from sharing the light and the light cannot be overcome. It is eternal.

It has been said that you can't really know someone except in community, and so we are gathered here tonight in community to share in the good news with one another and then take it out into the world where it can be shared with others.

Mary and Joseph knew about Jesus. They had angels visit them and so they knew he would heal all people of sin, but when the shepherds show up to share what they learned, Mary pondered it in her heart. Through the shepherds she knew Jesus a little better, and she pondered what it could mean.

In the song *Mary Did You Know*, which Tessa will sing later, Mark Lowry wondered just how much Mary knew. Mary knew that Jesus was special. She

knew he was from God. She knew he was the anointed one. But, how could she have known about the crucifixion and the resurrection? Could she even have imagined the torture he would endure?

In the manger, we get a foretaste of the things to come as the baby Jesus is wrapped in strips of cloth. Jesus at birth is wrapped as one who has died and in that we get a glimpse of the resurrection already at his birth. We also get a glimpse of Holy Communion as Jesus is placed in a food trough in the city of bread.

The Shepherds are told by the heavenly host to go into Bethlehem and look for a baby wrapped in strips of cloth – a very strange sight in deed – for who would wrap a baby in bandages like a dead person instead of a nice cozy blanket?

The shepherds are told – this child is the Savior. This child is the Healer of the World.

Do not be afraid, God's healing has entered the world. God's love and mercy is personified in Jesus Christ our Lord and Healer, and he comes to us in an unassuming tiny baby, the sight of which opens our hearts to all of the possibilities of living in love.

Like Jesus in the manger, we are beloved children of God. How we look at babies is how God looks at us. How we look at the infant Jesus, is how God is looking back at us.

Just as we can hold no grudge against a baby, so we receive God's forgiveness and that forgiveness that starts with God is for the healing of all people.

Forgiveness is the healing balm of God, the light that shatters all darkness, the light that stops people from stumbling in fear, worry, and doubt.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. It did not overcome it!

Let us take that light out into the world, because we are not only saved, but we are healed. We are healed to be healers. We are light bearers for the sake of the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.