

CHRISTMAS EVE COMMENTARY

Service of Lessons and Carols

This service was not designed for a sermon, but, unfortunately, I am, so permit me to share a few words as we prepare to welcome our newborn King at midnight tonight. As we've looked through the nine selected lessons for our Service of Lessons and Carols, I just want to briefly put everything into perspective, and answer some crucial questions about what is happening today, about what is happening tonight, about what will happen tomorrow. I will ask who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Who? Who is our focus on tonight as we wait? That's an easy one. It is on Jesus Christ. But who is He? He is God Himself. He is God Almighty, the One who made you and preserves you, the One through whom all the world was made and is held together; and He is a child in the Virgin's womb—weak, fragile, helpless, dependent on her for His very life. God made man, and we will get to why.

What? What does it matter? Why be here? What does this event mean for your daily life? It means everything. It means hell or heaven, sin or grace, life or death, God's mercy or His anger. This is the most important day in your life, because God is coming; He is coming for you.

When? That's another easy one. St. Paul says and we will hear on Sunday, *when the time had fully come*. God had an hourglass of mercy and as each sand dribbled down, as each prophecy was revealed, we came closer to this day, this day when God had so ruled history that Joseph and Mary would be in Bethlehem, that Rome would be in power, and that there would be peace so that the message could be spread, when shepherds would be in fields, when Magi would be looking at stars, when *the time had fully come*.

Where? Exactly where the prophets had said. It was no secret where Christ would come. When Herod asked his scholars, they told him *in Bethlehem Ephrathah* He will come. But where else? Will He come only in Bethlehem, or will He be born in you tonight as well, through a renewed faith, through a reinvigorated faithfulness, born in His Word that we heard today, and fueled by your Baptism and by His Holy Supper? Where?

And now the hard one: Why? We could think about this one all night. Not because I was so handsome, not because you were so smart, not because any one here was so loving, not because we built this building—there was no reason He had to come. He had a perfectly fine throne in heaven. He had angels worshipping Him at His feet; why would He need them far away, praising Him from the skies? Why? Because He chose to come; because He chose you and because He chose me. He was moved purely by His love—His love we did not deserve; and that is what grace is: undeserved love. No matter what has happened this past year, no matter what sins have been committed, no matter what unfaithfulness has revealed itself, that grace is still the Grace of God, born in Bethlehem for you...for you. The most important words in Scripture: for you. Not the person next to you only—for you. No matter what you've done, no matter where you live, no matter how old you are, no matter if you are a man, a woman, or a child—for you! For me!

And how? Well, the angel told the Virgin *nothing is impossible with God*. He willed to save us. He willed to live the perfect life we cannot live. He willed to die our death. He chose to and nothing is impossible with God. You are saved. You are forgiven. You are redeemed, because Christ that first Christmas, and He comes tonight. As you welcome family and friends this holiday season, welcome your Brother who took your flesh to take your place. As you open those gifts under the tree, open the greatest Gift of all, who took the present no one wanted: our sin and death, and in its place gave us forgiveness, and life, and salvation. And if that doesn't give you a reason to smile when you wake up tomorrow, I don't know what will. Your Lord is coming. He is coming to defeat death; He is coming to forgive sin. Come, Lord Jesus, come! Amen.