

SERMON FOR CHRISTMAS EVE 2021

TEXT: LUKE 2: 1-14

THEME: WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT CHRISTMAS?

In the name of the Christ Child:

In post World War I Germany there was a boy by the name of Gunther. He was a beautiful child whose body and mind were twisted in the womb before he was born. He was forsaken as a child by his mother and his years as a young child was spent hidden away in the back room of his grandmother's house. Gunther is taken from that place as a child to a Lutheran mission place of mercy, called Bethel. There he is no longer seen as a throwaway piece of human waste, but he is treated with dignity and love. It is at Bethel that he hears the stories about Jesus, and learns the hymns which sing praise to God for His love for sinners.

The name Bethel actually means house of God, and this Bethel was truly a house of God, as it housed many children who would be considered worthless and expendable. There you would see children and others whose bodies were gripped with epilepsy, there would be others who would be crippled, others blind, still others mentally disabled. At this place they literally were housed by people who were the hands, face and presence of God. They were cared for by deaconesses who had a heart for caring for those who

were in need of love. These people were in a place of mercy, surrounded by an outside world that showed no mercy. Bethel was directed by a man by the name of Pastor Fritz. He treated those at Bethel with the love of God, all in an effort to lead them and to show them the love of God in their Savior Jesus Christ.

Before Gunther came to Bethel he knew nothing at all about Christmas. In his little world lived in the backroom of his grandmother's home, everyday was the same, each day was like the next. There was cold, and darkness, and no cause for celebration. But now at Bethel, Gunther and the rest of those in the community were celebrating a church season called Advent. They were preparing for the celebration of the birth of the baby Jesus. One of the songs that they learned to sing was a hymn written by Paul Gerhardt, called: "O Lord How Shall I Meet You?" It is hymn number 334 in our hymnal. The opening words ask the question: "O Lord, how shall I meet you, how welcome you aright? Your people long to greet you, my hope my heart's delight." As Gunther sung these words, he wondered what in the world he was singing about? And then another hymn was sung, "Lift up your heads O mighty gates, the King of glory waits." And also another hymn, this one with a Christmas theme: " Ah dearest Jesus holy Child prepare a bed soft undefiled, a quiet chamber set apart for You to dwell within my heart." There were devotions

held around an Advent wreath and a manger scene was set up and put on display. Christmas began to come alive for the residents of Bethel, and Gunther took it all in, wondering what in the world this all was about.

This was a strange new world, a different world for Gunther. It was wholly unlike anything that he had experienced in his short life. And so, just when the congregation is singing a hymn proclaiming the mighty gates to fling open wide, Gunther lets loose with his complaint: “There is a crack in everything!” For this little boy, while anxiously awaiting for the joy of Christmas, was still afraid. And who wouldn’t be with all of the events that he had experienced in his past. And his cry turned into a cry for help: “WHAT IS SO GREAT ABOUT CHRISTMAS?”

Pastor Fritz heard this cry, and enlisted the other children at Bethel to help him share with Gunther what was really so great about Christmas. Probably the simplest answer for the question: What is so great about Christmas came from a little girl, who answered: “Because everything has a crack.”

With that Pastor Fritz gathered Gunther to his side and explained: “Yes Gunther, it is true, everything has a crack. There is a crack in everything. And God sees the crack better than we do, and the crack is even worse than we think it is. That is why God sent His Son from the heavenly home to our

earthly home. Not to patch up the crack but to make everything new. And that is the reason why, Gunther, that Christmas is so great!”

The Good News of Christmas is not that God came down from heaven to begin a repair job here on planet earth. He didn't come to plaster over the brokenness and cracks we see in the world everyday. He didn't come down to put a fresh coat of paint over the sinfulness and dirt of our lives. He didn't even come down from heaven to work the art of an embalmer to put a happy face over the death that grips the world.

What happened at Christmas, and this is what the angels sing about, is that God came down from heaven in the person of Jesus to bring Heaven's peace to the earth. Just as the Bible says: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men... **14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

Jesus came to give life, new life, and give it abundantly. He says; “Behold I make all things new.” He came down from heaven, not to be glorified, but to

give His life in death as a sacrifice and payment for sin. He didn't come into the world to reform the world, or to paint over our problems and issues, He came to live and die for the world, He came to buy back the world He created from the clutches of sin, Satan, and death. He came to give His life as a ransom for many. He came to be your Savior. He was born, He lived, He died and He rose again, for you! He comes, and says that even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death He is there with you, to lead, guide, and comfort you. So that you can be certain that nothing will ever separate you from His love.

What makes Christmas so great is that in a world that is darkened by sin, a world that marches daily towards death, a world in which love, mercy and grace are not to be found, God invaded our world in the person of a baby born in Bethlehem. And from that stable, and from His cross, and from His empty tomb the love that God has for you radiates with life giving power. That love is shared with you tonight, as you come to His Table, to receive the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation in His very body and blood.

And that is why Christmas is so great! God loves you in Jesus Christ. He loves you who are broken hearted, He loves you who are despised, He loves you totally and completely. His love is for you, now and forever, for to you is born in the city of David a Savior He is Christ the Lord! Amen

Adapted from a sermon written by John Pless that was placed on the 1517.com web site.