

“Jesus” means “Yahweh saves”

Luke 2:8-14

A sermon for the fourth Sunday of Advent and/or Christmas

In the TV movie, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charlie Brown struggles with Christmas being so commercialized. He goes to a Nativity Scene. Then Lucy sends him off to find a Christmas tree, and he finds the smallest one. Along the way they talk about what Christmas is. Linus says something and then there's Snoopy's Doghouse and finally the tree is decorated.

When this Christmas Special was produced, there was a big battle about including Linus reading the Christmas Gospel. The author, Charles Schulz, and the producer, Bill Melendez, fought with the advertisers who said you can't put the Gospel in there. That's not what we want. And Schulz said, "If we're going to make a Christmas Special, this is what it's really about." Schulz and Melendez won the battle, and that's the way it remains.

We run the danger of turning Christmas into something fanciful. It's good to have fun, humor, and use our imaginations. What if a tiger were there? Bethlehem didn't have snow, but let's add snow. Parts of the world have no pine trees. What do we do then? We import various items and are diverted from the main thing.

The dispute about Linus is what he read. If you go back and look at what he read, he did not read the first seven verses of Luke 2 about going to Nazareth and being in a manger. He also didn't read the last part, Luke 2:15-20 about the shepherds going to see the child. He read only Luke 2:8-14. It's important for us to recognize what was happening.

Luke 2:14: "Glory to God in the Highest!" It says: "There was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host." How many is a "multitude"? It's not billions, or trillions, or quadrillions, or quintillions, or sextillions. The heavens are filled, as it says in Luke 2:10, with "great joy!" What was the "great joy"? The text goes on: The angels are looking down at the earth and saying, "WOW!" This is the big "WOW!" The angels exclaim: "This is how God is solving the problem of sin and death!" Nobody could imagine that he would solve it this way. That he would come himself, truly himself as a little baby.

They are singing "Glory," and then it goes back to what the real message is. This is what Linus read: "Be not afraid: for behold I bring you good news ("Gospel") of a

great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

A Savior is one who saves from something as well as for something. In the traditional Old Testament lesson for Christmas from Isaiah 9:2: “Those who were in great darkness.” What it means is: “Into our darkness,” whatever darkness there may be in your life or mine, past, present, or future, he comes to take care of it.

We are familiar with the word, “Hallelujah.” It’s a Hebrew sentence that says: “Let us praise.” It’s not: “Let us praise God.” It’s not: “Let us praise the Lord.” It is: “Let us praise Yah.” “Hallelujah.” “Let us praise Yahweh.” This is that name for the God who acts and who keeps his promises. When it says in Luke 2:11, “a Savior,” it’s referring to the name “Jesus.” If we look back to Matthew 1:21, it says: “You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people.” The name “Jesus” is a sentence which means, “Yahweh saves.” The God who is faithful from the beginning and has acted and is acting again to save. The Christmas hymn, “Good Christian Friends, Rejoice and Sing!”, says in the third verse: “Now you need not fear the grave, Jesus Christ was born to save.” He saves us from the grave.

It goes on in Luke 2:11: “For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” It’s not only the “what” but the “how.” The “how” that Christ, the Anointed One who is anointed in in the sense that kings are anointed and also in the sense of being anointed to a task, to doing something. In the Gospel of John it says that “the glory” is the cross (John 1:14, 12:23, and 12:28). That’s what he is doing. That’s the “how.” It’s not an idea. It’s not a feeling. It’s that he comes and **does**. The Gospel is lifted up again in our singing of “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” in the third verse: “Mild he lays his glory by, Born that we no more may die.”

Christmas is about Good Friday and Easter. It’s about the whole “WOW” of what God is doing. We celebrate that he has worked from eternity, has accomplished salvation, and that he is now coming to each one of us personally and comes to give us life now and forever in Him.

Amen