

December 22, 2019

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Reading: Isaiah 7.10-15, Matthew 1.18-25

The Message: Christmas Lost and Found

1809. The international scene was tumultuous. Napoleon was sweeping through Austria; blood was flowing freely. Nobody then cared about babies. But the world was overlooking some terribly significant births.

For example, the statesman William Gladstone was born that year. That same year, the poet Alfred Tennyson was born to an obscure minister and his wife. On the American continent, Oliver Wendell Holmes was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts. And not far away in Boston, Edgar Allan Poe began life. It was also in that same year that a physician named Darwin and his wife named their child Charles Robert. And that same year produced the cries of a newborn infant in a rugged log cabin in Kentucky -- Abraham Lincoln.

If there had been news broadcasts at that time, it would have sounded something like: "The destiny of the world is being shaped on an Austrian battlefield today." But history was actually being shaped in the cradles of England and America.

Everyone thought taxation was the big news--when Jesus was born. But a young Jewish woman cradled the biggest news of all: the birth of the Saviour.

What does it mean that the Saviour comes as a baby?

Long term – not like Superman whooshing in and overturning everything in a moment. This is going to be a long term enterprise.

Unexpected – Tennyson, Lincoln -- who knew? A baby in Bethlehem – who knew?

Mary and Joseph knew. God sent them an angel to tell them they were to be the recipients of God's grace.

The Gift of God's grace – that's what Mary accepted, Joseph accepted – a difficult gift to receive

That's true for us too

Receiving the gifts of grace this Christmas can be very difficult.

A few years ago a teen and his father were driving back to Ontario after a golf holiday when teenagers dropped a hunk of cement off a bridge. The son was badly injured.

This week I met that young man at a memorial for his friend John Morgan, a neighbour of Gail McDermid. John has spent the last fifteen years volunteering for the CNIB and Miki was one of those he became friends with. While it is sad that this kind man has died, he has left an annual income to ten of the folk he has helped to learn Braille, use special computers, accompany and generally become family for them. Miki is a joyful, humour filled man, made resilient by the love of another.

A gift of grace. It is hard to receive sometimes. And so Christmas has to come once a year to help us to practice receiving it every day of our lives.

Receiving the gift of God's grace -- Saying Yes to God's love brings to birth in our world a new and marvellous thing. It prepares us and others for the coming of the Messiah.

The Christmas Story relies strongly upon two people saying yes to God's ultimate gift of Grace. And then Jesus goes and seeks out two more and two more as he calls the disciples; and they go out seeking folk to say yes to God's gift of grace two by two right down to today when one by one and two by two, we are challenged to say yes to God's grace.

When we say 'yes' to God's grace we say yes to that which will change our lives and give to them meaning and purpose. When we say yes to God's grace we say yes to that which will transform our lives and give to them a radiance that transforms others.

It is so hard to really embrace what this season is truly about: - which is nothing more or less than making room in our lives for God's love, - than saying yes to the wonderful gift that God offers us through Christ our Lord.

God's love comes as an unfomed baby so that we have time to grow with him. To learn how to receive grace first in the cooing of an infant -- getting used to receiving love.

As you prepare for Christmas, remember that hope, peace, joy, and love, are gifts of grace to us, not demands upon us. They are gifts by which God comes to us and changes us and our world.

Say yes to God's love as did Mary and Joseph even though the saying yes involves risk and sacrifice.

Receive the gift. And walk in the path of Jesus with open hands and hearts, and God will come to you and to our world, and make the rough places smooth., will bring order of chaos and life out of death. This is the mission of our God through Jesus.