

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
Pastor Steve Loy
Christmas Eve
December 24, 2016

Reading: Luke 2:1-20

Some of you might remember the movie 2012. It was a movie in which the world came to an end. Based on a vague reference to the Mayan calendar the movie attempts to out do all disaster movies. When it came out in 2009 and our daughter Annie who was nineteen years. One evening at the dinner table asked, “Dad, do you believe in 2012?” Sometimes having a father who is a pastor isn’t very fun. Pastors can be real kill joys when it comes to theology and questions about the meaning of life. So I asked her, “Do you want to know if I think that the year 2012 will come? Do you want to know if I think the end of the Mayan calendar means that the world will end? Do I think Jesus will return in 2012? Do I think the end of the world will be cataclysmic? What are you really asking me?”

Across the table she sat looking at me blankly as if to say, “I had no idea you could make a simple question so difficult.” She seemed to be asking, “I just saw this movie that was kind of scary and I want to know what you think. I don’t really want an analysis of the cosmos. Can we just talk about this over dinner like any other family might?”

You might find this odd, but I think our daughters question about 2012 has everything to do with Christmas and with what we expect from God. Movies like 2012 want us to believe that behind normal every day events lies a divine plan, a clock counting down to an apocalyptic destruction of the earth. Some people think that God will get fed up with humanity and destroy the earth to teach us a lesson. They believe God will come with vengeance to destroy evil people and faithless people and save those who believe the right things. I don’t believe any of those things and that view of God perverse and troubling. It is a message that has nothing to do with Jesus. The God we celebrate tonight is the God who comes into everyday life, in the flesh, in ordinary ways like the birth of a child.

The shepherds are told that when they go to Bethlehem they will see a sign. And what was the sign. Was it a star in the sky? No. Was that someone would perform a miracle? No. The sign was they would find a baby wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. Life doesn’t get much more ordinary than that, and it doesn’t get much more miraculous either.

The miracle of the Christmas story is that God comes to us in ordinary ways, through other people, through every day experiences. Those who want to twist a cataclysmic destruction of the world into good news about God forget the simple message of Christmas, that God meets us where we are in the work place, in our homes, in our families, in the joys and difficulties of everyday life.

I have a way you can see God in action for sure. If you want to see what God is doing in your life begin to keep a journal – every night before you go to sleep, reflect on your day and notice one person who said something kind, did something loving or went out of their way to help

someone. Reflect on a moment that was extraordinary in its ordinariness. It happens every day, but we don't see it, because we don't look for it. Somehow we have been trained to look for the bad and the difficult – at least I know I was. When we shift our focus and look for the good and the generous qualities in other people they are present every day. If you begin making a note of those things you will begin to see God working in your life, because God is present and active every day changing our lives for better.

I read a newspaper account of a man who told the story of how he became an atheist. As a child he attended Calvary Lutheran Church in Wilkinsburg, PA. He began to evaluate what his pastor said in sermons and decided that everything his pastor said could be just as true without God. I hate to think that Lutherans are responsible for someone becoming an atheist, but I suppose it can happen. So as I was going over what I would say tonight I asked myself, could everything I say be just as true without God? I think it could, because I believe in a God who is most powerfully and obviously present in ordinary things and in everyday experiences of life.

The preschool children sang Away in a Manger for to their parents this week. They sang about a child asleep in some hay and some cattle. All ordinary things. And it was a holy moment. Those children sang with passion and love, excited to show their parents what they were learning and what they could do. When we look for God in the miraculous and the supernatural, we are looking in the wrong place. Some don't believe in God, because they want God to suspend the laws of nature and do something unbelievable. Some believe that if they pray a magic prayer God will change the laws of the universe to give them what they want.

Luke goes out of his way to make the birth of Jesus painfully ordinary – crowds of people, no room at the inn, a baby laying in straw, the air filled with the smell of a barn yard in hope that we will begin to see God's presence in the everyday things of life. Luke says to us, stop looking to the heavens for God and look right here. He tells about shepherds in the fields at night frightened by angels in the hope that we will imagine every day of life permeated with God's presence, all distinction between heaven and earth blurred until we aren't quite sure which is which.

The man who wrote the article about becoming an atheist looks at ordinary everyday life and sees no God. I look at an ordinary everyday life and see God everywhere. I don't think his lack of faith makes him a bad person, it is just that somehow we have eyes of faith and he doesn't and God loves him in the same way God loves us.

Setting apart a night like this as a holy moment is an important thing to do because without it we might forget how sacred every day is. Because as much as we might like to segregate the world into sacred and secular we can't. The birth of Jesus in a barn tell us there is no sacred and secular – there's just God – in the world and in our lives. There is no sacred work and secular work, there is just our life with God – all of life, filled with God. The miracle of Christmas.