

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Christmas Eve: December 24, 2024

Jesus Accessible to All

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good evening and Merry Christmas! Welcome to Christ the Lord Church. Well, the night is finally here, the trees are decorated, the tinsel hung, Santa is on his way! And here you are at church to celebrate the birth of the Christ child. What I would like to share with you this evening is that although we are here in church, the Christ child came to the world. God made sure there were no boundaries in who Jesus would be accessible to.

Indeed, Luke acknowledges and then turns away from the structures of political powers just quickly mentioning Augustus and Quirinius. We are proud to proclaim that emperors, governments, laws, and world orders were trumped by the birth of a child who at first glance is of insignificance to society. Those who were ruling and in charge were in the dark.

But there is more. Reading the Christmas story in context, Luke also turns away from religious powers as well - mainly the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. So those who are suspected to be in the know, especially about a Messiah, they also remained in the dark.

The word of God didn't go to the synagogue. The angel's announcement of the fulfillment of the prophecy goes not to the Temple but to lowly shepherds living in the fields. Salvation belongs to everyone, regardless. In both the birth of Jesus, and throughout his life, he was accessible, not locked into the Temple priesthood or the call of the government.

If we want to experience the newborn Christ, and we take Luke's account seriously we need to recognize that Jesus is being born where people need him most. Not to those on high, but instead to all those who were insignificant, or not part of those with power.

I have come to realize that God sending angels to the shepherds first is much bigger than reaching out to just outsiders. As a migrant farmer or field worker can tell you, spend enough time in the field, shunned by decent and religious folk, forced to work rather than worship, feeling isolated and disappointed by God, or maybe overwhelmed by grief, and we stop caring. We give up trying to be accepted by religion, or even by God, as there is just a need to get on with life, survival. But God does not give up on anyone. God sends angels directly to the people who have possibly given up on God.

Jesus comes vulnerable, helpless, as “a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger”. Jesus is born like any other baby, except Jesus is born on the road and laid in a feeding trough. No magi at this manger scene. Jesus is born among the lowly and the poor, being rejected with no place to even be born.

Yes, the babe born at Bethlehem is about more than reaching out to outsiders. Jesus is born to those who have been outside so long that they have given up on God. Taking just a brief look at the end of Jesus’ life, and again we see that there is no religious or political support. We remember the so-called penitent thief on the cross next to Jesus, to whom Jesus promised without need for any religious ritual, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Even on the cross, Jesus is available to everyone.

Hopefully hearing this on Christmas Eve is good news because I know and love people who have been on the outside of faith for so long, they have given up on God. But this poor and innocent babe, God-incarnate, gives me hope. I know people so down and blue this Christmas that they cannot come to worship. And I suspect you might know those people as well. I suspect that the startling news that, while you and I sit in worship, God is sending angels out into the fields with good news of great joy, and Jesus is being born among people who have given up on everything.

I am glad we will share our Communion meal together to nourish ourselves spiritually for the work ahead, that this child Jesus will call us to do. And as you and I sit in worship offering our prayers and thanksgivings, let us know our donations are hard at work. I know just as you do there are people feeding those lost children of God a decent meal even as I speak. I know others

who are making long distant calls to check in on each other. I know even the atheists are spreading holiday joy. Yes, for one night maybe Jesus will sleep in heavenly peace.

I want to take tonight to invite you to spend Christmas Eve either physically or spiritually for just a few moments neither in the glow of a tree-lit sanctuary nor the sentimentality of carols and candles nor the warmth of the family hearth, but for one moment in your mind focus in on those in the fields of the isolated, the disenfranchised and the forgotten. Or maybe it is even you who needs to look deep into your own painful places of spiritual wilderness, because God speaks the good news of Christ's coming *there*. Not to those in power, not to those who think they are in the know, but where God is needed most. In the painful places, in the shelter outside of an inn. God brings great joy to those who need it most right *there*.

And because we are called to herald the good news, being in church tonight is your call to nourish yourself, so you can nourish others. Preach the Gospel by sharing a God with no boundaries, whose only rule is love. Jesus is the reason for the season, but his true call to us is to live this way all year round.

Jesus comes to those who need him, he is not interested in power and kingdoms, he is interested in your heart. Spread the word, spread the hope. Jesus came into the world from an unwed woman. The magi (the pagans) are the ones who recognized God in their midst. It was the workers in the field who hear the first message of salvation, and the marginalized neighborhood who welcomes the Christ child. It is God who chooses the lowly and the broken to rise. Salvation is accessible to all. Christmas is here, let the Savior in. Amen