

Twass The Morning After Christmas 2021

As I child I can remember my Dad reciting, “Twass the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. The stockings were hung by the chimney with care in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there. The children were nestled all snug in their beds while visions of sugar plums danced in their heads. Mama in her kerchief and I in my cap had just settled down for a long winters nap, when out on the lawn there arose such a clatter I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.” On he would go. It’s a good memory. I heard that someone many years later wrote a poem for the day after Christmas. “Twass the day after Christmas and all through the house there was wall to wall mess, no place for a mouse. The new toys are scattered in every which way, trains, dolls and games, just everything to play. The stockings that were hung by the chimney with care are now on the floor, full of dog hair. The dear little children, from short ones to tall, this day after Christmas are fed Pepto Bismol, for their tummies are stuffed with all kinds of things, like candy and peanuts and pineapple rings. The children are cranky from not enough sleep, they fight over toys, two boys and one jeep? Timmy can’t find the wheels to his small model car, how on earth did they get in the baby’s food jar? Sis is still crying, her eyes are all red, our puppy has chewed off her Barbie doll’s head.” Well, you get the drift. I like Dad’s better but today is the day after Christmas.

It’s been 11 years since the day after Christmas fell on a Sunday. It will be another six years when it happens again. I’ve preached something similar to this message three times I think on Sunday, Dec. 26. (Twass the Morning After Christmas). I almost asked Sarah to preach and then I decided, if it’s going to be six years before the day after Christmas falls on Sunday, this would probably be my last time to preach this, so I’m going to share this message.

The morning after Christmas. The morning after the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, what was it like? What was happening? In Bethlehem, taxes still had to be paid, people were still arriving in the little town. There was no holiday since they didn’t know it was Christmas yet! The financial burden and the political situation hadn’t changed. The Romans still ruled and Israel was still not free. I’m sure people were still griping and cursing about having to pay their taxes, having to register for a census, it was all government over reach, the inconvenience of having to travel clear to Bethlehem from wherever they lived to pay their taxes, to stand in long lines, the impersonal treatment. There was plenty to complain about in Bethlehem that morning.

It was no doubt, business as usual the day after Jesus was born. There was still wickedness and evil, sin and terror. Murder and malice still reigned in the hearts of men and women and to the average citizen in Bethlehem, nothing had changed. A baby was born in a stable? Big deal. Babies are born every day. What's so special about a baby born in a barn?

The day after Jesus was born, wise men were still looking for him, they hadn't found him yet. They were certain they weren't going back to report anything to Herod. He was too weird and besides, God warned them in a dream not to report back to Herod.

The day after Jesus was born the shepherds were still tending their sheep, but something had certainly changed for them. They still looked and smelled like shepherds, but they were telling everyone who would listen about what they had seen and heard the night before. "You aren't going to believe this, but we saw angels. I'm telling you, big as life they were, and terrifying at first. They brought us good news and about the Messiah and we went to see him. No. Really! It's good news!"

What happens after Christmas? Herod feels threatened and sets in motion plans to have all of the baby boys under the age of 2 slaughtered. Weeping is heard throughout the land as parents lose their infants to hell's desperate scheme. Joseph and Mary, having been warned in a dream to flee with their new born son, are about to become political refugees in Egypt, remaining there as long as Herod is alive and searching for them.

The day after Christ's birth, Simeon and Anna are still waiting for the promise of God to be fulfilled, that they would not die until they had seen the Lord's Christ. And in her heart Mary is pondering all of yesterday's events as well as the events of the past nine months while she cares for her new born son. Nothing much has changed, and yet we know that everything has changed in so many ways. **Twas the morning after Christmas and what had changed?**

God was no longer silent. God spoke (but you had to be listening). It had been nearly 400 years since the last prophet, 400 years of silence and then God speaks again. And this time in a most extraordinary fashion. The writer of Hebrews said, **"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son..." Hebrews 1:1-2** God breaks his silence on this holy night. Angels proclaim Salvation has come, Christ the Savior is born. People were still groping in darkness but with the birth of Jesus, the light of the world penetrated the darkness. We read it last night. **"The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." John**

1:9 After all these years with no word of hope, the silence and stillness is broken with the voice of God, and his voice sounded like the cry of a newborn infant. **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” John 1:14** The Word, spoken to us in love. God was no longer silent, Christ was born in Bethlehem and everything had changed but you had to be listening. Joseph and Mary heard. The shepherds heard. The Magi heard. Anna and Simeon heard. In a strange way, Herod heard, but you had to be listening for the sound, listening for God to speak. It’s the same today. Are you listening? God is still speaking, through His Son, through His living Word, through circumstances, but you have to be listening! What else changed the day after Christmas?

God not only spoke to us, God acted in time, coming to dwell among us. I love the fact that God acted in the fullness of time. Paul wrote, **“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons...and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.” Galatians 4:4-5,7**

God acted in time, in Christ, coming to dwell among us, to save us from our sins, to grant us adoption as sons and daughters of God, to make us heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. It’s so amazing. I referenced it earlier this Advent season, the way God orchestrated time. Jim McGuiggan wrote, “Insist – and so we should – that people do what they want to do, that they have their shrewd schemes, flex their muscles, control the armies and hand out orders. Say all these things because they’re true; but say this also, that in and through all...God gets his way and as surely as Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God is the Lord of history.”

God was no longer silent and God acted in time to bring redemption to us. The angels spoke of a sign given – a sign God was speaking and acting and among us and the sign was a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. In the fullness of time, the sign had come, God’s son, born of a woman to redeem us so we could receive full rights as sons and daughters of God.

What changed? God came near to us. God came along side of us. His voice penetrated the silence, the light of his life penetrated the darkness. Christ the Savior is born in the fullness of time. What changed the day after Christmas?

We are no longer alone! It is one of the most profound realities of the Incarnation. **“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel –**

which means, ‘God with us.’” Matthew 1:23 God is with us and we are not alone anymore. God among us. Joseph and Mary knew it. The shepherds knew it. The wise men knew it. Simeon and Anna knew it. God had come down to us. God was revealing himself to us. Immanuel had come to us.

Some of you know the acute pain of loneliness. It is overwhelming at times, smothering and suffocating at times. Those around you don’t know the effort it takes to simply make it through each day, alone. May I tell you, even though you feel lonely this morning, you are not alone. His name is Immanuel. God has come to be with you. Christ the Savior is born and everything changed. He promised he would never leave us and never forsake us. He is the wonderful counselor, the timeless companion who journeys with us every moment of every day. You are not alone. God is with you, near to you, in this moment, regardless of your circumstances. Listen for him. Look for him. Christ is born and it’s good news for all the people! What changed the day after Christmas?

We’ve been invited to the table! For the people living in Israel at the time of Jesus’ birth, there wasn’t much of a middle class. It was rich and poor, the ruling class and the peasants, the occupied and the occupiers. Regular folks didn’t have a seat at the table, but Jesus’ birth signaled a different economy in God’s kingdom. Mary, this young peasant girl living in obscurity, when she knew she had been chosen to be the mother of the Messiah sang, **“He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.”** **Luke 1:46-55** “God has regarded the lowly.”

I don’t know if you can understand, but some of us know what it’s like to be overlooked, disregarded, shoved aside, passed over, worse than that, just flat out ignored! But Jesus’ birth announced a new economy. It wasn’t the powerful, the wealthy, the popular, the proud that heard the announcement or that were invited to that stable in Bethlehem, it was the lowly, the forgotten, the overlooked, the humble who were called to witness heaven’s greatest miracle. It was the shepherds, those who had no place at society’s table who were given seats at God’s table of forgiveness and redemption. It was good news for people like us that didn’t get good news. It was a place at God’s table and my...how we hungry folks ate. The hungry were filled with good things. Salvation, hope, redemption, light and life and peace! Welcome to his table.

Jesus came to save us from our sins and to restore the fellowship with the Father that had been broken. He came to make all things new and to bring us home to the Father. He called us to redemption, to reconciliation, to come and sit at the Father's table with him.

Things changed dramatically because of that first Christmas. God spoke, God acted, God came among us so we are not alone, God included us and invited us to come to him, to come to his table but that isn't all. His coming into this world provides eternal life for us. He came from heaven to earth, to a virgin's womb in order to dwell among us, to be with us, to save us. Now, through his death and resurrection and ascension, he has prepared a place for us and opened the way for us to be with him and dwell with him forever. What changed the day after Christmas? The plan was set in motion so that, in Christ...

Death has lost its grip. The writer of Hebrews declares, **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” Hebrews 2:14-15** Jesus “shared in their humanity” – that's the incarnation, his coming in the flesh, so that by his living and dying and then rising in triumph over death, he defeated the enemy and defeated death itself. Because Jesus came, we don't have to fear death. I know it still robs us, it still is an enemy that wounds us and inflicts pain, but death has lost its' permanent grip. Death doesn't win, the grave can't hold us. Jesus is the resurrection and the life and because he lives, because we put our trust and faith in him, we shall live also.

Tw'as the morning after Christmas. The manger is empty now, but so is the tomb! Christ is born! Alleluia! Christ is risen! Alleluia! He came to dwell among us and he is with us still if we will look for him. He broke the silence with his birth and he is still speaking if we will listen. He has given us a place at the table, declaring that we are his children. He has delivered us from fear and from death's grip. In Christ we have redemption, we have hope, we have eternal life. It's the morning after Christmas. Rejoice! Christ is born, Christ is risen, Christ reigns, Christ conquers, Christ is victor and He shall reign forever and ever! Hallelujah!