

Pardon the Interruption: Jesus Is Here!  
Luke 2:1-20  
Christmas Eve 7/11 p.m.  
Rev. Dave Baldrige  
Palm Harbor United Methodist Church, Palm Harbor, Florida

**(Video---“It All Starts Here”, Floodgate Productions)**

This is Christmas! I love Christmas! And it all starts here! We could jump in the middle of the story...the story of the nativity.. but since it's Christmas Eve and you have no place to go I thought I would start where this story of God's love begins. The very first book of the Bible. So I thought I would just go through the entire Bible. It starts here....the Bible. Oh rather than reading you the entire Bible for you right now I thought I would condense the Bible to 50 words. This anonymous writing tells the Bible in 50 words like this:

God made  
Adam bit  
Noah arked  
Abraham split  
Joseph ruled  
Jacob fooled  
Bush talked  
Moses balked  
Pharaoh plagued  
People walked  
Sea divided  
Tablets guided  
Promise landed  
Saul freaked  
David peeked  
Prophets warned  
Jesus born  
God walked  
Love talked  
Anger crucified  
Hope died  
Love rose  
Spirit flamed  
Word spread  
People saved

So now you can leave and let people know that at the Christmas Eve service you attended the story of the entire Bible was told to you---in 50 words.

But let me share with now the story of stories.

We focus on a child who will bring light into the darkness, joy into despair. Pardon the Interruption....it's Christmas Eve. I love Christmas! Pardon the Interruption...Joseph...but your betrothed is going to have a child. Pardon the Interruption Mary but the child you are carrying is Jesus, the Son of God. Pardon the Interruption Shepherds.....but this angel has good news of a great joy which shall be to all people.

And here we are on a Thursday night----and well, as far as I know most of you don't go to church on a Thursday night. I don't go to church on Thursday night. Pardon the Interruption on this Thursday night....Jesus is Here! Woo-hoo!!!! This is what Christmas is about. The most important gifts were not the gold, frankincense and myrrh that the Wise Men would eventually bring. The most important gift tonight....is the gift of Jesus Himself. God sent His son to be Emmanuel, God with us. God became flesh and dwelt among us. He is with us.

As much time, care, and even expense that Sarah and I might go through to buy our grandchildren gifts....we are especially realizing at the age a couple of them are is that they are more fascinated by the paper than they are the gift.

Now my dad, now deceased, would open a gift he would open up a gift a certain way. He would hold the gift, look at the pretty wrapping, and then reach in his pocket to get his pocket knife, and slowly turn the package and carefully use his knife to unseal one end...then he would go to the other end and unseal it with his knife, and then yes, he would go to the bottom and slice where the pieces of wrapping paper had been taped. It would drive my brother and me nuts. We just wanted to scream....open the present already!

So I am not a carefully package opener. I'm what I call a ripper opener. How many ripper opener people do we have here tonight? That's what I'm talking about. So very small children often struggle, but they rip the paper off....and then they play with the paper and forget the gift that was carefully chosen, and even expensive.

Now let me segue into a spiritual truth here. I have ripped this paper off and I'm playing with this paper while I let that gift just sit there...I'm more intrigued by the paper. Now before wrapping this paper I wrote certain words on the inside of the wrapping paper....money, job, fun, riches, self, ego, world, culture, society, getting ahead, me-first. And you know that is what kind of happens in our lives....we spend time with the wrapping paper....all these things....and miss what the real gift is....that real gift is Jesus.

This most carefully chosen gift given to us is Jesus and yet we are preoccupied with all the things of the world. Oh my. Let's not forget why Jesus came.

Paul Harvey was a popular radio announcer from the 1950's to the 1990's. At his notoriety he 24 million people weekly and was broadcast on more than 1200 radio stations. He was known for talking about "The Rest of the Story." And he always concluded his broadcasts saying, "Paul Harvey....Gooood day!" Well the story I'm getting ready to share, although anonymous is one that Paul Harvey loved to share at Christmas time.

Our protagonist is not a scrooge. In fact he was a kind, and quite decent, mostly good man. Honest in his dealings and generous to his family, he was commonly received as a man of good values.

But, he could never bring himself to believe the story of Christ. The incarnation, the God born a man by virgin birth... It just didn't make sense to him, and he was too honest a man to feign devotion to a story he could not accept. The story of Jesus, God coming to Earth as a man, simply didn't add up in his mind.

And so one Christmas, feeling his pretense of devotion had thoroughly run its course, he told his wife he would not be going with the family to Church.

"I'm sorry to upset you," he explained, "but I would simply feel like a hypocrite." He told her that he would stay at home, and wait for them to return from (Midnight Mass) Christmas Eve service.

Shortly after the family had left a snowstorm moved into the area. Settling in his chair with a cup of coffee, the man began to relax for the evening.

Before too long, the soft white noise of the steady snow was interrupted by a loud thud. Then another, and another. At first the man concluded someone must have been throwing snowballs against his living room window, but upon peering out from behind the blinds his yard appeared quite empty.

Reluctantly venturing outside, he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the falling snow, just beneath his living room window. Having been caught in the storm the desperate birds were trying in vain to fly through the large landscape window.

Being the decent man that he was, he knew he couldn't leave the stranded birds to freeze in the night storm, and resolved to find a solution. It was just then that he thought of the barn where his children stabled their pony. It would be warm, sheltered, and safe... If he could get the birds into it.

Quickly he put on a jacket and galoshes, and began trekking through the snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on the light; but the birds did not fly in. Thinking that food might entice them, he hurried back to the house and retrieved some bread crumbs. Sprinkling the crumbs in the snow, the man made a trail to the warmly lit doorway of the stable.

But still, the birds vainly fought the cold beneath his living room window. He tried catching them. He tried shooing them into the barn by waving his arms and walking around them. But nothing worked. As he approached, they scattered in almost every direction, and as soon as he retreated back they resumed their hopeless attempts to fly through his living room window.

The man realized that the birds were simply too afraid of him. To them, after all, he was a giant and terrifying creature. ‘If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me – that I’m not trying to hurt them. But how?’ Any move he made simply confused, and frightened them.

“If only I could let them know I want them to be safe,” he said allowed. “If only I could be a bird, and mingle with them and speak their language, I could let them know that I mean them no harm. I could show them the way to the safe warm barn, but...” realization seemed to wash over him, “but I guess I would have to be one of them; so that they could see, and hear, and understand.”

At that moment the church bells began to ring through the dense cold. He stood there listening to the bells, *Adeste Fidelis*. (O Come All Ye, Faithful) Listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. And he sank to his knees in the snow.

He got it.....Jesus is Here!!!!!! God became flesh and dwelt among us. Pardon the Interruption, Jesus is Here! Paul Harvey might say, “Good day!” But I say, Fantastic Day.....Because it all starts here----“Good news of a great joy that will be for all people.

We did the Bible in 50 words....now let me share the Christmas story in 50 words....written by Dana Livesay.

God Reached Down

Spirit’s Touch

Virgin Concerned

Joseph feared much

Angel said

Don’t be afraid

Joseph awoke

Marriage vows made

Augustus decreed

Bethlehem bound

Joseph and Mary

No room found

Word made flesh

Born on straw

Angels Hosannah

Shepherds Awe

Cattle Low as Shepherds Kneel

Mary Ponders

God is Real

Too much to comprehend. Too beautiful to dismiss. Emmanuel. The ruler of heaven has come to us. Glorious is our King. Praise the name above all names. He came to us....this glorious Jesus. The Lord our King. We fall down on our knees. Tonight we praise the name above all names. Pardon the Interruption....but this is the story of stories...and it all starts here. (11:00 p.m.---The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The story continues....the birth of Christ brought God to man.....the cross of Christ brought man to God. And He gave Himself up for us....)