

“Star-Crossed Lover”

Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon Series: Star Search – Seeking the God beyond the Galaxies

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

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On Christmas Eve a daughter brings her new fiancé to meet her parents for the first time. After dinner, the young man asks to speak with her father alone to formally ask permission to marry his daughter. “So,” the father begins, “what are your plans?” “I am a Bible scholar,” the young man replies. “A Bible scholar. Admirable,” the father says, “but what will you do to provide for my daughter?” “I will study the Scriptures,” the young scholar responds, “and God will provide for us.” “And how will you buy her house?” “I will concentrate on my studies,” the young man says, “and God will provide.” “And how will you support children?” “Don’t worry, sir,” the young man replies, “God will provide.” Later, the mother asks her husband, “So? How did it go?” The father replies, “He has no job, no prospects and no plans. The good news is he thinks I’m God.”

Christmas is a time for love and a time for giving. Perhaps this is why so many couples get engaged this time of year. For some, popping the question, even at Christmas, can be tough. Tedd Kidd was five years older than Janet. While she was in college he was working hundreds of miles from her. During their seven year relationship, they always seemed to be at different places in their lives. Yet every Christmas Eve, Tedd proposed to her. And every Christmas Eve, Janet would say, “No, not yet.” Finally, when they were both living in Dallas, Tedd decided this is it. He took Janet to a romantic restaurant and prepared to ask one final time. If she said “No” it was time to move on without her. After dessert, Tedd summoned up his courage. Since Janet had a Christmas gift for him, he let her go first. She handed him a box the size of a book. He opened the package and inside found a cross-stitch made by Janet. It simply said, “Yes.”¹

“Yes” is the answer we want to hear most at Christmas. Kids want to hear a big “Yes” from Santa Claus and their parents when they ask for gifts. In one case a father asked his small daughter well in advance what she would like for Christmas. “I’d like a baby brother,” she replied. Coincidentally, her mother returned from the hospital on Christmas Eve with a baby boy in her arms. When the father asked the same question the next year, the little girl, “If it’s not too painful for Mommy, this year I would like a pony!” Even Senior Citizens make requests of Santa this time of year. One woman wrote, “I’m much older than your normal writers. For Christmas, I would like a 6-foot hunk who is about 62 years old, in good shape and has money.”

“Yes” is what we want to hear, not just on Christmas, but throughout the year. “Yes, you made the team!” “Yes, you were accepted into our college.” “Yes, you passed with flying colors, here’s your diploma.” “Yes, I will marry you.” “Yes, you got the job or the promotion.” “Yes, we’ll sign the deal.” “Yes, she had the baby.” “Yes, my love, after all these decades, I’d say I do all over again.”

¹ Story told by Rubel Shelly, Nashville, Tennessee;

It's a wonderful thing to be in love at Christmas. But sometimes love doesn't work out. In the opening lines of his play, Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare described his famous couple as "star-crossed lovers." It's a hint, from the author, that their love is doomed and that the play will end in tragedy. We know because it's written in the stars. What starts as a "Yes" ends with a fatal, heart wrenching "No."

Sadly, Christmas is also a time when we hear "No." It's a time when we spend more time, more money and more patience than we have. It's said more car accidents occur, more people die of "natural causes," more marriages fall apart, and more psychiatrists' patients suffer regressions. One poll in England suggested there are three million family arguments each Christmas. I think that number is low.² "No, I'm not inviting them to dinner." "No, I don't love you anymore." "No, honey, mom and dad can't live in the same house anymore." "No, I don't have a problem, you do." "No, I won't forgive you." "No, I don't believe in God anymore." "No, the chemotherapy didn't work." It took seven years for Janet Kidd to finally cross stitched "Yes" for her beloved Tedd. Seventeen years later, her pastor shared that story at her funeral.

There may be times, maybe even now, when you feel you are leading a star-crossed life. Every door is closed. Every answer is "No." That's hardest to hear from a loved one. We all long for love. In addition to food, water and shelter, humans need love to survive and thrive. Imagine a life without the love of your parents, the love of friends, the love of a spouse or the love of your children. Some of you don't have to imagine it. You are missing one or more of those loves right now. The truth is, we spend so much time and energy trying to please people, to make them love us. And sometimes the love we get is self-serving and manipulative. One woman wrote:

Dearest Jimmy, No words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you'll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you, I love you, I love you! Yours forever, Marie. P.S. And congratulations on winning the state lottery.

The hunger for love can even drive us to the edge. Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme was 27 years old when she leveled a handgun at President Ford in 1975. After police stopped the assassination, investigators discovered she was a disciple of Charles Manson. When asked why she would follow such a killer, Fromme said when she was kicked out of her home at the age of 19, she met Manson who promised to take care of her. "I was willing to kill and die for him because he loved me. I made a decision long ago that whoever loved me first could have my life."³ There were a lot of "No's" in Squeaky Fromme's life. So she gave her life to Charles Manson – her star, her lover. And he used her. Through her, he hoped to make our nation cry, "No!"

When you think about it there were more "No's" than "Yes's" on the first Christmas. "No, this is not possible," Mary said, "I can't be pregnant. I am a virgin." "No, I don't believe you," Joseph cried, "If you're pregnant, the wedding is off." "No,"

² Nicky Gumble, Why Christmas?, Alpha Resources, Alpha North America.

³ Ron Hutchcraft, *Five Needs Your Child Must Have Met at Home*, Zondervan, 1995

said Caesar Augustus, “You can’t stay in your home. You must go back to where you came from and pay taxes.” “No,” said King Herod, “there is no new born King here. And I’ll kill anyone who tries to take my throne.” “No,” said the innkeeper, “there is no room in the inn.” “No,” said the people partying at the inn, “we’re too busy to go out back to the stable and see our Savior.”

When Jesus came into the world on Christmas, He ran right into a wall of “No’s.” Sure there was a handful of people who said, “Yes” to Him: Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, the Wise men and the angels. But the “No” from this world was louder. And as the years passed it became stronger. “No, Jesus, don’t heal people on the Sabbath.” “No don’t hang out with sinners.” “No, don’t tell me to change my ways.” “No, don’t make me love my enemies, give up lust or judging. Don’t ask me to give or forgive.” And to this day, we are still saying “No” to Him. No, I don’t have time for you God. No, I don’t believe in you God. No, I won’t do what you say. Instead of saying “Yes” to our Heavenly Father, we say “Yes” to a world that often uses and abuses us. We keep hoping some earthly love will save us. But it can’t.

Jesus is the brilliant Star God sent to light our way home. Jesus is the gift of love the Lord gave us. And what did we do with God’s gift? One dark Friday, on a hill outside the holy city, we said a long, loud, final “No!” We stretched Him out like a star on the Cross and then put out His Light. That was our final verdict. “No God, you can’t come into our world. No God, you can’t have my life.” Then we buried God’s gift of love.

But there was one thing we never counted on. Jesus came to earth for this one purpose: to give His life for you. He didn’t come to use you or abuse you. He came to do what no earthly star or lover can do for you. He came to set you free. And the only way to do that was for Him to take the punishment for our sin, to take our place. Yes, He possessed more power than any star. Yes, He showed deeper love than any lover. But between the star and the lover is the Cross. Jesus is God’s cross-stitched “Yes.” This Star Crossed Lover is God’s eternal “Yes” to you. No power in heaven or on earth can stop God’s Yes. Sin and death cannot even keep God’s Yes in the grave. There is only one thing which can stop God’s “Yes.”

And that’s your “No.”

This Christmas, don’t leave Jesus out in the cold, don’t turn Him away, don’t tell Him, “No!” This Christmas, say the one thing Jesus traveled from heaven, to earth, to hell to hear: Yes, Lord, I believe. Come be the light that shines in my darkness. Come be the Lord that lights my way home.

An elderly woman named Stella Thornhope was struggling with her first Christmas alone. Her husband died of cancer just a few months prior. She felt terribly alone—so much so she decided she was not going to decorate for Christmas.

Late that afternoon the doorbell rang, and there was a delivery boy with a box. He said, “Mrs. Thornhope?” She nodded. He said, “Would you sign here?” She invited him

in and closed the door to get away from the cold. She signed the paper and said, "What's in the box?" The young man laughed and opened up the flap. Inside was a little puppy, a golden Labrador Retriever. The delivery boy picked up the squirming pup and explained, "This is for you, Ma'am. He's six weeks old, completely housebroken." The young puppy began to wiggle in happiness at being released from captivity.

"Who sent this?" Mrs. Thornhope asked. The young man set the animal down and handed her an envelope, "It's all explained in this envelope, Ma'am. The dog was bought last July while its mother was still pregnant. It was meant to be a Christmas gift to you." The young man then handed her a book, *How to Care for Your Labrador Retriever*.

In desperation she again asked, "Who sent me this puppy?" As the young man turned to leave, he said, "Your husband, Ma'am. Merry Christmas."

She opened up the letter from her husband. He had written it three weeks before he died and left it with the kennel owners to be delivered with the puppy as his last Christmas gift to her. The letter was full of love and encouragement. He vowed he was waiting for the day when she would join him. He sent her this little buddy to keep her company until then.

She wiped away the tears, put the letter down, and then remembering the puppy at her feet, she picked up that golden furry ball and held it to her neck. Then she looked out the window at the lights that outlined the neighbor's house, and she heard from the radio in the kitchen the strains of "Joy to the World, the Lord has Come." Suddenly Stella felt the most amazing sensation of peace washing over her. Her heart felt a joy and a wonder greater than the grief and loneliness.

"Little fella," she said to the dog, "It's just you and me. But you know what? There's a box down in the basement I'll bet you'd like. It's got a little Christmas tree in it and some decorations and some lights that are going to impress you. And there's a manger scene down there. Let's go get it."

God has a way of sending a star to remind us that love is stronger than death.
Light is more powerful than darkness. Good will overcome evil.
God sent more than a puppy.
He sent the One He loves most.
This Christmas, say "Yes" to Jesus.