

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
Christmas Eve  
Luke 2  
December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Only once in his entire life did he tell his story. My grandfather was born in East St. Louis, Ill. in the year 1900. His father was a man named George Arnold and he knew very little about him. My grandfather, Clifford, apparently appeared in court with his mother when he was about 5 years old. You see, more than once was my grandfather left to roam the streets of East St. Louis alone – looking for warmth on a cold winter’s day – searching for food.

It’s a tragic story but it ends well. It’s a story none of his children heard, because he wouldn’t talk about it... that is until just before he passed away. He shared a few details of what he could remember with his granddaughter – my eldest sister. We learned later, through the power of the internet, details of our family’s history that were never spoken by my grandfather. He never told his story, some of it he never knew. It was difficult one and tragic. However, I wished he would have. I would have liked to know. Sharing true stories is important. And for that reason you heard it again tonight.

Telling the story is how we learn... it’s how we know. Knowing the story gives us the information we need to make good decisions and even affects the way we think. Knowing the story puts us into the narrative of life. This narrative belongs to you. This narrative, the story of Jesus, places you in that story... and now you know and here you are.

Now I want you to think about what happens when you hear a great story from a great storyteller. It’s as if you are transported to that place and time. Your imagination runs wild. You may even begin to fill in the details that the storyteller is leaving out. We add in those things that would affect our senses – how bright or dark, how the air felt, what it must have sounded like – or even smelled like. We become a part of the narrative.

That’s what Luke does. He writes to Theophilus and he simply tells a story – the most important story ever told. Before he tells the story of Jesus he tells the story of John in order to move the hearer from the Old Testament to the New Testament. He tells us how similar the story of John and the story of Jesus actually are... the angel appearing... his blessed announcement about not being afraid, and the glories result that the Lord has accomplished.

And then on to the details. *“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered...”* The story begins with facts. This is how God got Mary and Joseph into the city of their ancestor David. The narrative moves and we move with it. Can you see it? A man advanced in years with a “more than pregnant” young mother walking along dangerous roads where marauders were looking for easy targets. In your story, is Mary on a donkey? Every picture you have ever seen puts her on a beast of burden – and it makes sense. The Bible doesn’t tell us but maybe you see it. You see, that’s how you are put in that story. That’s the great storyteller, Luke, putting something in the imagination of those who hear this marvelous story so that they might be transported back in time to this historically significant main event.

He could have given you the details of the difficulties along the 80 mile way from Nazareth to Bethlehem. He could have chronicled what the crowd of people gathered for registration sounded like when they arrived in small little Bethlehem. He could have told you what that house smelled like with all those animals. But no, he left that to your imagination. That’s what a good

storyteller does. He gives you the details and lets your imagination run wild filling in all the gaps. It brings the story alive. It puts you in that place.

And here is the greatest thing about this story. It's real. It really happened and it happened for you. It makes it all the more sweet to know that this is not a made up fairytale... that we can be there in our imaginations at a true point in history – at a place that really exists. And this matters, beloved in the Lord. It matters because if it weren't true, there would be no need for a day like today. There would be no need for Christmas and Epiphany and Easter – and every other day that revolves around the Savior's life. It matters that it is real, because we know of something of ourselves that is very real – our sins.

There is no need to imagine sin. We see it. We experience it, and we live it. No need to put you in the midst of trouble, because we find ourselves right in the midst of it every day. I'm not sure if it's the misdeeds of those around you that is causing you to suffer. I'm not sure if it's your own bad decisions that have hurt yourself and others around you this 2016 now almost spent. All I know is that you, like me, are a sinner. You have forsaken the law of God. You have turned this heartwarming story written by the hand of St. Luke into absolute necessity. Your sins are real and you know them – so does your Lord. Today is a day for a new start. Today is the day leading into 2017 for us to repent and walk on the path of the Lord.

So, as we imagine ourselves with Mary, Joseph, the Shepherd's and the Savior on a night like tonight – it's no fairytale for a reason. It's real because what Jesus came to do was real. He died because of real sins. He died because of real death. He came in a humble estate to die between two criminals on Good Friday to defeat death. And the words of the angel cries forth and gives us every bit of comfort we need in the dark and dreary world we live in today: "*Fear not,*" says the angel, "*for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which is for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.*"

The angel puts you right there. The story is told once again – for you. It's a blessed story told by a grand storyteller. It's a true story – like that of my grandfather. My grandfather kept his story to himself. Yet we tell the story time and time again. Because this is His story. This is our story. Go tell it on the Mountain. Now sing we, now rejoice. A blessed Christmas to you. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.