

“It wasn’t supposed to happen this way.” As we gather here on this Christmas Eve unlike any other, perhaps that is what you’re thinking. We’re supposed to be gathered together in one place, the Faith Lutheran family at one big happy Christmas Eve Service—not scattered about between two services and people watching from home.

Christmas as we know it will be way different this year. None of the same family gatherings as in years past. Sure, there’s presents thanks to the postal service, but it isn’t the same to mail your loved one a gift because half of the fun is watching him or her open it. There are none of the same holiday parties at school, work, or church. That holiday feeling just isn’t here in the same way as it was in years past. Maybe you’re left feeling like it’s always winter and never Christmas.

Perhaps you can think of other ways that 2020 didn’t meet your expectations. The pandemic has made it so that there hasn’t been much in the way of family gatherings at all this year. Closures and physical distancing have made even the simplest joy of sitting with a friend over a coffee an impossibility. Not to mention the toll this widespread sickness has brought upon our world, country, and community. How could this be what God wanted? What good could be worked out of this?

“It wasn’t supposed to happen this way.” The lead up had been so good. Mary was told by the angel that her son, **“will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”**” But great and kingly hardly describe the circumstances of Jesus’ birth.

Mary and Joseph traveled all the way to Bethlehem as Mary was well along in her pregnancy. That could hardly be the royal treatment for the mother of a king. As the last door was slammed in their face and they faced the cold, hard facts that labor would take place in a stable, that could hardly be accommodations fit for a Savior.

**“And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”** That’s all Luke records about the circumstances of Jesus’ birth. He records it as casually as you might say I stopped at my mailbox to pick up the mail. Certainly there must have been smells. There must have been discomfort. It must have been cold. How could this be what God wanted? What good could be worked out of this?

“It wasn’t supposed to happen this way.” Perhaps that’s what Mary thought as she watched him hang there on the cross. Born in a wooden manger, dying on a wooden cross. Instead of a star like the one that shone at His birth, there was darkness over the land. Is this a fitting end for a king? The angel told me He is the

Son of God. Is this a fitting end for God's Son? Is this the fate of "...**a Savior who is Christ the Lord?**" Is this the "...**good news of great joy that will be for all the people?**"

As Mary thought back to the rest of Jesus' life, perhaps this wasn't out of the ordinary. His first guests weren't the rich and famous, but lowly shepherds. He didn't follow in Joseph's footsteps becoming a carpenter, but ultimately became a wandering preacher. He could have gathered a team of disciples from the upper echelons of society, but instead he gathered a rag-tag team of misfits: a tax collector, fishermen, and other humble people.

My little boy just couldn't leave good enough alone. He could have made a fine living working miracles: healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and providing wine to weddings. Yet He said He always had to be about His Father's business. How could this be what His Father wanted? What good could be worked out of this?

"But maybe something good could come out of this just yet." When Jesus gave up His spirit and died, the earth shook, the rocks were split, the temple curtain was torn in two. They didn't need an angel, the soldiers and those surrounding Jesus confessed, "**Surely this was the Son of God!**" Could it be that something greater was going on here than meets the eyes? Could the Father have worked good out of this evil event?

Only human flesh and blood can have nails pounded into them. Only a man could fully understand what it means to be human, suffering, thirsting, and sorrowing in this vale of tears. How could God take the place of mankind? He's up in Heaven. The Heavenly Father is just that, up above without flesh, without skin in the game.

This Son of God risked everything to come to this world. Suffering lack, suffering rejection, being brought to nothing that we might be brought to something. Being brought into a world of filth, vermin, and sickness that we might be made clean, spotless, and healthy again.

Yet this Son of God brought everything with Him to combat the forces of darkness. Only God could take on the sins of the world. Only God could pay the price for all our wrongdoings. Only God could redeem creation and make all things new.

And so much brighter was that Easter morning, much brighter than the Christmas star, when Jesus Christ, the Son of God rose again from the dead affirming our suspicions that maybe something good could come out of this just yet.

"Maybe something good could come out of this just yet." If she had to do it again, she would probably choose not to give birth in a stable again. But as she held in her arms her newborn son, maybe life wasn't so bad after all. "**But Mary**

**treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.**” After hearing the shepherds’ incredible report of angels coming to them and directing them to their lodging, no doubt Her Heavenly Father was smiling down upon them, blessing this baby and promising good things for His future.

Could it be that the baby’s lowly origin means that He will one day become the friend of the lowly and downtrodden? Could it be that His humble birth means that He will be the king of the everyman? A king for me? A king for you? As He was born in filth and manure, could it be that that’s where He comes to us even today: in the filth of our sins and in the manure of our messed-up situations?

Jesus Christ was born on Christmas in circumstances that were not picture perfect to show you that He has come to save you who sins daily and is in need of forgiveness. He enters into your life and walks alongside you in your struggles, your failures, and your fears. Your king comes to you in an approachable way because He wants you to know that you are not alone. The original Christmas story isn’t pretty but it affirms our suspicions that maybe something good could come out of this just yet.

“But maybe something good could come out of this just yet.” As we gather on this Christmas Eve unlike any other, know that the original Christmas Eve was pretty unique itself. Our God is an unexpected God and works through unusual means to accomplish extraordinary things. He sent His Son to be born in a barn. He sent that same Son to die on a cross for the salvation of the world. He raised that Son again on the third day that you might live eternally.

As you gather here or you tune in to this broadcast, understand that the Lord comes to meet you in this Christmas Eve unlike any other to bring you peace, to bring you hope, and to bring you comfort. It’s in these hard times that we can step back and understand what’s really important.

As good as presents are, as beautiful as the Christmas decorations are, as wonderful as a family gathering is—there is no Christmas without the Christ-child. And the good news is that Jesus comes to you and is yours this night. Nothing can take Him away.

This Christ-child is in the redemption business, turning a stable into a luxury suite and a cross into a throne just by His very presence. As He comes to you this evening, you can offer Him your anxieties, disappointments, and fears and He will bear them and carry them for you. We have faith that in some way, in some manner, Christ will redeem 2020. Jesus Christ affirms our suspicions that maybe something good could come out of this just yet.