

Christmas Eve. The scripture text is taken from Luke 2:1-20

Danish Philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard tells the following story: "Once there was a young king who was very wealthy. His power was known throughout the world. But he was not happy because he wanted a wife. Without a queen, his vast palace was empty.

One day, while riding through the streets of a small village, he saw a beautiful peasant girl. She was so lovely, that his heart was won. He wanted her more than anything he had ever desired.

For many days he would ride by her house in his carriage, on the hope of seeing her for just a moment in passing. He wondered how he might win her love. He thought, "I will draw up a royal decree and required her to be brought before me to become the queen of my land."

But, as he considered, he realized that she was a subject and would be forced to obey. He could never be certain that he had won her love.

Then he said to himself, "I'll call on her in person. I'll dress in my finest royal clothes, wear my diamond rings, my silver sword, my shiny black boots, and my most colorful tunic. I'll overwhelm her and sweep her off her feet to become my bride."

But as he thought about this idea, he knew that he would always wonder if she had married him for the riches and the power he could give her.

Then, he decided to dress like a peasant, go to the village, and in disguise, he would approach her house. But somehow, even this plan didn't appeal to him, but at last, he knew what he had to do.

He would shed his royal robes, go to the village and become one of the peasants. He would work, and suffer with them. He would actually become a peasant.

And that is what he did. And he won her as his wife. This plot has been played out in numerous movies and stories.

But the heart of this tale, has much in common with the Christmas Story.

It's a great illustration of how God sought to win the world. He sent His Son to earth as a lowly baby born to a common ordinary couple. God laid aside His royal robes and became one of us. And He did win His bride, the church.

And yet, there are some very distinct and wonderful differences, because even though Christ set aside His royal robes and His majesty to become one of us, this great event in history, was not done on the sly, it was heralded by the hosts of heaven.

On that special night, multitudes of angels burst into chorus and announced, "Hey, everybody, a baby is born!"

But not everyone heard that angelic choir that night, just a few shepherds on the side of a hill. In fact, not everyone even noticed a new star in the East, hung there by a proud Father announcing the birth of His Son, the Newborn King. And only a few wise-men from the East, followed this star.

Though Jesus claimed to be the light of the world, not every eye was open to receiving the glorious light of the Son of God. Some were blinded by their own doubt. Some were just simply absorbed in the reality of life, just trying to make it in a difficult world.

But surely, things are different today? Right? We have the benefit of hindsight and the New Testament to tell us all about this great event and what it means to each of us.

And as we look around our homes, our church, and our community, it's clear that America is ready for Christmas.

The decorations are all up, the presents bought, the Christmas Turkey is on the table, and the family (for good or for bad) has gathered. Today, this morning and again this evening, we are celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior and His entrance into this world, as one of us, God in the flesh.

But this morning, I want to be a little non-traditional and go beyond what would be normal for a Christmas Eve sermon.

I want to look at Luke's Gospel, because the writer of Luke's Gospel not only gives us one of the most familiar passages concerning the coming of the baby Jesus in a manger. But the writer of Luke's Gospel also speaks of an event where Christ will make another appearance here on earth.

In Luke's Gospel, chapter 2, in verse 6, he writes: "While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

But it was also under the same inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the writer of Luke's Gospel wrote these words about Jesus' next coming. Listen to these words from chapter 21, starting at verse 27: "Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

His first coming to Bethlehem brought great joy to many people, first of all, of course, to Mary and Joseph. But also to the shepherds, the wise men, Simeon, and Anna. And as Jesus grew and began His public ministry, a large number of people, realized just what had taken place in the birth of this man.

The birth of Jesus, was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, that the people of Israel had hoped and dreamed of for hundreds of years. However, not everyone believed that Jesus was the Messiah of God. Some saw Jesus as a prophet, or some saw Jesus as just a good person, who did good things. Some even saw Him as a radical.

The people of ancient Israel were looking for a messiah, they wanted a political and a military leader, who would raise up an army, draw his sword, leading an army into battle, kick the hated Roman occupiers out, and establish his kingdom, like that of King David. But Jesus was a political or a military leader. He came as one to serve, and to save us from the power of sin.

But Jesus' next coming will bring even greater joy for those who are in Christ, who follow Him in faith. Now as we look around, it's obvious that America is ready to celebrate the birth of Jesus, that rolls around every December 25th. But is America ready for Christ's return?

But what if we knew, that the moment of His return could be tonight? Would it make any difference in our lives? Would it change our plans for this holiday season?

Wouldn't that be great, if on the day we celebrate His first coming, Christ Jesus would return to this world in power and in glory to gather His saints and take us home to heaven with Him?

God's Word is clear. Christ will return to this world to tear down the Kingdoms of men, to crush hell underfoot, and to establish His reign forevermore. We don't know the day or the hour, but Christ will return, and as Christians we should be looking forward to that day, with anticipation and with hope.

So let's take a few moments to consider just a few of the similarities and the differences that exist between our Lord's first coming and His next coming.

Jesus birth was announced 700 years before it happened by the prophet Isaiah. We all know the words found in Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14, the prophet writes: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."

500 years before His birth it was even prophesied where this event would take place. In the Book of Micah, chapter 5, verse 2, the prophet writes: "But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days."

But Jesus Himself told the disciples not to be worried, because even though He would be going away, He would return. The Apostle Paul when writing to the church in Thessalonica, confirms the promise of Christ's return with these words. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, starting at verse 14: "For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have died. For this, we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord Himself with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and we will be with the Lord forever." (Verses 14 through 17)

Once again, we can see the truth that began with a babe in a manger, has a message that says: "I came once, and I will come again!"

Jesus first coming to this earth, changed the world. In just three and half years of ministry, Jesus turned this world upside down.

While Jesus was here on this earth, He taught the principles of the Kingdom of God. He performed miracles, He battled Satan and his minions, He showed us a new life through faith and trust in Him.

The birth of Jesus was not given, so that we would have an excuse to decorate the house, eat too much, spend too much money on stuff, and take time off of work.

Christ Jesus came to this world, at God's timing and at God's choosing. He was born in a lowly farm animal stable, He grew up in poverty, He was in a sense, a homeless man, He held no political office or power, yet He taught many about the love of God, and promised the gift of eternal life with God in heaven.

His first coming changed the world. But His second coming will also change the world. The scriptures promise that those who die in Christ will be resurrected. What a great and precious promise, especially at this time of the year.

There some in here, who have lost ones this past year, and of course, this time of the year is difficult for those who have lost loved ones through death.

Christmas, can be a lonely time, as we gaze on that empty chair, as we gather together as families that have grown smaller.

In many ways, this Christmas just won't be the same without that special person who is now gone. But that is where, we as Christians have cause for celebration, especially during this Christmas Season, because those who professed their faith and their trust in Jesus the Christ as Lord and Savior, they are now with the Lord, and one day, we will see our loved ones again in God's heavenly kingdom.

And all Christians who are alive when Jesus returns will be instantly changed and given eternal bodies, that will never grow old, get sick, or die.

When Jesus comes again, weakness will be turned to strength. Defeat will be turned to victory. And all of our human frailties will give way to divine immortality. There will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more sickness, no more trials, no more tears, no more temptation, no more sin, and no more death.

When Jesus comes the second time, we will all be changed. And it will happen quicker, that it takes to turn on a light switch.

The Apostle Paul tells us, all this will happen in the twinkling of an eye. Thank God, that Christ will come again.

There are other differences that are striking. When Jesus first came to this earth, His life was marked by humility. When Jesus began His public ministry, He ministered to those who were considered the dregs of society, those who were considered the lowest of the low. Christ Jesus came as a servant, who loved and served all people.

And when Christ died upon that Roman cross on Calvary's Hill, He died for all people. You see, the first time Jesus came, He called people to follow Him to become Christians, when He returns in power and in glory, in the near future, He will take those who are Christians to be with Him.

Christmas is a time of celebration. And people of every background will join in this celebration. Many recognize the birth of Christ child, in Bethlehem's manger, but fail to realize the reason He came. Oh, they may celebrate His first coming, but the second one, will bring nothing but horror and shame.

Jesus birth validated the claim of the Old Testament Prophets, that a Savior would come, but it also validates the fact that He will come again, not as a babe born in Bethlehem, but as King of Kings, and Lord of lords, coming in power and in glory to gather His own and to cast those who have rejected Him, into eternal punishment, separated from Him forever.

In closing I will leave you with this. Jesus is the reason for the season. God loves you, and He loves, and loves you more than you will ever know. He came into this world as one of us, to forgive us of our sins, and bring us with Him, to His heavenly home. By God's baptismal grace, through faith, you and

I have been given the greatest gift we could ever have been given. This gift doesn't wear out, rust, or have to be returned. It last forever and ever. Your name, my name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. What a wonderful gift, purchased by the blood of Christ, and by His resurrection, this Christmas, that lasts throughout eternity. From our family to yours, May God bless You and your family, and may each of you have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Amen.

Let us pray:

Eternal God, in your perfect will, and in your perfect timing, You sent your only begotten Son into this world to save us from the power of sin, death and devil. As we begin the Christmas Season help us to reaffirm our faith, to live as if Christ were to return at any given moment, and help us to see, beyond this present day, and to look forward with hope and anticipation to the glorious return of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. All these things we humbly pray, in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.