

**McCabe United Methodist Church**  
**The Purpose of Christmas . . . (Part 1)**  
**Luke 1:46-55: December 1 & 2, 2012**  
**Pastor Rick Fossum**

("The Christmas Story" adapted from Walter Wangerin, Jr.: THE MANGER IS EMPTY)

I'm going to tell you a story. I hope it helps answer the question, "*What is the purpose of Christmas?*" It's the first part of an Advent series Ray and I are doing.

This message is based on a story by Walter Wangerin, Jr. The story goes like this:

Once upon a time . . . the whole world was dark and gloomy. It had been dark for so long that the people had forgotten what the light was like. The people who walked in this darkness were lonely people, sad people, lost people.

Now, God so loved the world, especially God loved the people in the world and so one day God decided to do something new, something different. God decided to send his only son into the world to be their light. And this is how God did it:

Once upon a time, when the whole earth was covered in darkness, God in heaven turned to Gabriel, the angel, and said, "**Gabriel.**"

And the angel said, "**Yes, Lord.**"

And God said, "**Go down and tell my people about the light I am sending.**"

And so the angel flew down to the world. Across the oceans he flew, to a little province called Galilee, to a city called Nazareth, and in that city to a particular house, to a particular woman sleeping in that house. Her name was Mary. Mary was young and blameless and lovely. She was a virgin, but she dreamed of a man named Joseph because they would marry in four months time.

The angel Gabriel appeared at Mary's bedside and he began to grow bright. Brighter and brighter the angel grew. And God in heaven whispered, "**Gabriel, what are you waiting for . . . go on, talk to her.**"

The angel opened his mouth and spoke to Mary. "**Mary,**" he said. But the angel's voice was loud like a clap of thunder. He wasn't used to a whisper. Poor Mary, she jumped up. Her eyes flew open and . . . and she saw the light beside her. Mary was afraid.

God in heaven whispered, "**Hurry Gabriel. Comfort her.**"

And so the angel said, "**Mary.**" But this time, he softened his voice. "**Mary,**" the angel said, "**God loves you. God favors you. God is with you.**"

"**God favors me?**" Mary was trembling. Her mind was racing. "**What does it mean? What is he saying,**" she thought? "**Why would an angel come to me?**"

"**Mary, don't be afraid,**" the angel said still more gently than before. And Mary grew calm, her mind quiet, and she began to listen.

"**Behold,**" said the angel, "**you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, and you shall call him Jesus.**"

"**A baby,**" thought Mary?" "**A baby?**"

"**Quickly, Gabriel,**" God in heaven said, "**tell her quickly what this means.**"

And then the angel did a wonderful thing. He stopped talking and started to sing.

"**Mary,**" he sang, "**the Son of the Most high he will be called. God shall give him the throne of David and he'll rule forever and ever.**"

"**A baby!**" thought Mary in spite of the singing angel. "**A baby would be nice!**" But there was a problem she couldn't ignore. Mary interrupted the singing angel. "**How can this be?**" she blurted out. The angel stopped singing and God in heaven began to smile. Mary didn't understand. For her, some things had to happen first for other things to happen second. "**How can this be?**" Mary repeated. "**I'm not married, you see. I don't have a husband yet.**"

Ah, that was the problem! There came a strange sound in Mary's bedroom, like an

angel giggling. For the thing he was telling Mary was a miracle, after all. The new thing God was doing didn't depend on people. No! First things don't have to come first for miracles or for God. The baby would have a father, but not the kind Mary imagined.

"**Oh, Mary,**" the angel continued with his singing. "**The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The power of God shall overshadow you. And you'll have a son . . . the son of God!**"

Mary said nothing for a minute and then her eyes grew bright like the angel's light. "**A baby,**" she whispered, "**the Son of God!**"

And the angel left and his light faded from her room. But Mary didn't mind the darkness anymore. She jumped from her bed, clapped her hands and twirled around. "**Oh,**" she wondered, "**who can I tell this good news to?**"

South Mary ran, to Judea, to the home of her friend and cousin, Elizabeth.

"**Hello Elizabeth,**" Mary shouted.

Elizabeth began to laugh. You see, the angel had also sung the same song to her. She knew all about it. So there they were, in the middle of that gloomy and dark world . . . there they were . . . two women, laughing. They laughed till they couldn't laugh anymore and then they began to cry for gladness. And God looked down from heaven and saw them. And the Lord God smiled.

When Mary returned to Nazareth, the man she was going to marry noticed some changes in her. Joseph became suspicious. "**Why do you smile all the time,**" he asked? And she said, "**Oh, you'll see.**"

"**Why are you always giggling? And why do you laugh all the time? And**

**what's that strange light in your eyes,"** Joseph asked?

And Mary said, **"Oh, you'll see."**

Well soon, Joseph saw all right and he was distressed. He saw her tummy and it was growing big. Joseph saw that Mary was going to have a baby and this upset him because he wasn't the baby's father.

**"How could this happen,"** he asked her?

And she said, **"It was the Holy Spirit."**

Poor Joseph, he grew miserable. **"Mary is lying to me,"** he thought.

Again, God in heaven turned to the angel. **"Gabriel,"** God said.

**"Yes Lord,"** the angel answered.

**"Go down,"** said God, **"go down right now. Tell Joseph the truth. The man is blinded by the darkness. He thinks that Mary has committed a sin. Go! Go!"**

And so a light grew bright in Joseph's sleep and he had a dream. **"Joseph,"** said the angel. **"Joseph, don't be afraid to take Mary for your wife. The baby conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. Mary didn't sin. She's not lying. Mary is going to have a baby and you shall call him Jesus. He'll be the Son of God. He'll bring light to this dark world and take away it's sin."**

When Joseph woke up, he was grinning from ear to ear.

Now, the people in Nazareth noticed the change in him, and they became suspicious. **"Why do you smile all the time,"** they asked him? **"Why are you always giggling?"**

**"Oh,"** Joseph said, **"you'll see."**

After they were married, Mary and Joseph seemed odd to the people who lived in darkness. **"Why are you laughing all the time,"** they asked? **"Why don't you fuss or fight? And what's that strange light in your eyes?"**

**"Oh, you'll see,"** they said. And they giggled some more. **"You'll see."** And God looked down from heaven and saw them. And the Lord God smiled.

Now it came to pass in those dark days, a command from Caesar: **"All the people must go to the cities of their ancestors and be counted,"** he ordered. So people began to travel.

Joseph had to obey. He and Mary traveled south together, to the province named Judea, to a little town called Bethlehem. Poor Mary and Joseph, they had come all that way and found the town crowded. There were no rooms or houses or trailers or anything for them to rent. Mary was huge with her child and tired. **"Joseph,"** she whispered, **"it's time. Oh, Joseph,"** she said, **"the baby is coming. It's time."**

**"Mary,"** he said, **"can you wait a little longer?"**

**"No,"** she said.

**"But Mary, there's no place for us."**

"**It's time,**" she said.

And so Joseph went running through the streets of Bethlehem looking for a place to stay . . . anyplace would do even a stable for animals. "**Mary,**" he said, "**is this all right? Do you mind?**"

"**No,**" Mary said. And she laid down on the straw. "**It's time!**"

So there it was that Mary brought forth her first born son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger. And there was light again in the world. And God looked down from heaven and saw the baby. And the Lord God smiled.

There were some shepherds in that same dark world, working in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks. And God turned to Gabriel and said, "**Gabriel.**"

And the angel answered, "**Yes, Lord?**"

And the Lord God said, "**Go down again. All the people must know what I'm doing. Go down and tell a few the good news and they'll tell a few more, till everyone has heard. Go!**"

And so the angel appeared before the tired shepherds. Their dark was shattered by the angel's bright light and they were afraid. "**Don't be afraid,**" the angel said. "**I bring you good news of a great joy for unto you is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you, you will find him wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.**"

Suddenly, the sky opened up and angels . . . 1000's of them started singing and praising God: "**Glory to God in the highest,**" they sang, "**and on earth, peace and goodwill to all.**"

Just as suddenly, it grew quiet again. The shepherds looked at each other and said, "**let's go to Bethlehem and see this miracle for ourselves.**"

The shepherds got up and ran as fast as they could to Bethlehem. They found the stable and in that stable they saw the baby lying in a manger. And there was Mary his mother and Joseph to. The shepherds went out into the town and began to tell everyone what the angel had said about this child.

Mary took her baby in her arms and she watched him. She smiled and whispered, "**Jesus, Jesus,**" for that was the baby's name. And God looked down from heaven and saw them. And the Lord God smiled.

Now, you might think that the story stops here. But it doesn't. You see, it was just the beginning. The story goes on until even today. We're all a part of the story. And the Light . . . the Light is still with us. We don't have to walk in the darkness anymore. The miracle of long ago is also the miracle of the here and now. And God looks down from heaven and sees you and you and you and all of us. And the Lord God smiles.

And this is the purpose of Christmas.