

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
24 December 2024

4:00 p.m. MT Worship
Christmas Eve

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“Christmas Time is Here”

NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.

Luke 2:1-20

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

“In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria...” (Luke 2:1-2)

When we hear “In Those Days,” we recognize those words as the beginning of the Christmas Story. But have you ever wondered why we have to endure through the boring stuff—the people with names we can’t pronounce in places far away—before we get to the Good Stuff (like the angels, shepherds, and the baby in the manger)?

Well, perhaps Luke’s prelude has purpose. For these verse set the stage for us to hear just how joyous the Good News really is.

Because you see, In Those Days the Leader of the Land was a power-hungry, people-abusing, getting-away-with-murder (literally) not great guy—Caesar Augustus. But, in Those Days,

no one seemed to care because he built a lot of fancy buildings with his name gilded across the top and he touted travel and tariffs and expanding infrastructure and development as the way to appease and please for the wealthiest folks: building forums, arenas and public baths. He put his name and face on everything, including currency: *Caesar is Lord*. And if that wasn’t vain enough, he loved to count people, not because they counted to him, but because the numbers made him look good. Hence the census.

In Those Days one of Caesar’s cronies, Quirinius—who was known for his zealous loyalty to Caesar and all things Rome—herded up and counted all these people in towns and villages so that he could tax whatever little property they had. Taxes that funded benefits they would never see. Because “they” were an occupied people, a poor people, living in the land of Palestine, living as faithful Jews

who refused to call Caesar their Lord.

Also, in Those Days a young couple dealing with an unconventional pregnancy, and now also, an ill-timed mandated road trip, they were away from Mary's loved ones who would have been her support system, her 'healthcare' system, if you will, as she gave birth.

In Those Days the couple finds themselves in the town of Joseph's family, because he's from the "important lineage," but in the end those hometown connections don't even matter because they find themselves without a place to stay—eventually accepting the humble hospitality of a stranger: *"Sure, my animals won't mind if you give birth in here."*

You see, "In Those Days" are the Days when the People *in Power* care more *about* Power than People.

The Days when policies and decrees that we didn't vote for affect our lives in ways no one even seems to care about.

The Days when we find ourselves unexpectedly Not Where We Wanted or Planned to Be.

The Days when we can't seem to find the Welcome we so desperately need.

The Days When All Seems Wrong and Nothing Seems Right...and there is Seemingly No End in Sight.

Those Days.

You know "Those Days."

The Days when the diagnosis is given. When the depression closes in. When the job is lost.

The Days when your loved dies. When the election goes the other way. When you get the rejection letter. When the knock comes at the door. When the text message rocks your world.

The Days when the accident changes everything. When your child breaks your heart. When your parent lets you down.

The Days when the News brings news of another tragedy, another war, another genocide, another injustice, another crisis, another scandal, another hate crime.

"Those Days" feel like *These* Days, don't they?

We too live in a place affected by the policies and decrees of

leaders, and we too, like Mary and Joseph know what it's like to have our lives upended by something unexpected.

Luke begins such a miraculous story with such mundane details about people and places and politics because What Was Happening In Those Days, is precisely what makes *This Day*, so special, *This Night* so divine.

When the vastness of God is embodied in the vulnerable humanity of a baby—it happens in the midst of real time, in a real place, to real people dealing with real life stuff.

And into the Messiness of Those Days came The Miracle of *This Day*: “*In those Days...while they were there, **THE TIME CAME**...and she gave birth to her son..*” (Luke 2:6-7).

The Time Came and the Baby was born. And Everything Changed.

But like the Shepherds, standing in the fields of our lives, keeping watch over what is ours to keep—homes, families, jobs, responsibilities—finding ourselves in the nighttime of our fears and worries of *Those Days*, WE often live as if we are not even aware that Christ has

come. That it is, in fact, Christmas Time.

The Shepherds do not yet know the Time has changed. They are living in their nighttime reality, the everydayness of their sheep watching. *Until* – the Good News reaches them by a foreign body hovering and shining in the night sky...is it a plane, is it a drone? Oh – it's an angel! Singing, “*Do not be afraid, for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born **THIS DAY**, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord,*” (Luke 2:11).

Into the bad news of “Those Days” comes the good news of “**This Day.**”

And this is the Moment when the shepherds realize that the Time Came. Christmas is Here. And...they realized that **THIS DAY** is not just about one day but about a whole new world order that will forever leave the fear of “Those Days” behind.

This Day inaugurates *Christ time*...and time governed by Christ is not known by the drudgery of business as usual, or the threat of imperial power, but rather by the inbreaking of the heavenly realm, the song of the angels, and the “good news of

great joy for **all** people...*and* peace on earth.”

“This Day” is a treasonous time to those in power; it’s a direct challenge to the imperial world of “Those Days.” Because this Savior will liberate the people from occupation, not oppress them.¹ This Savior and Lord is not about lording power over people, but rather becoming an everyday person himself, who loves all people, suffers with all people, forgives all people, inspires all people, embraces all people.

THIS DAY is a day of turning away from the fear of Those Days and toward freedom and joy: “*Do not be afraid,*”—It’s the very first word spoken after Jesus is born.”² Do not fear.

And the turning point from the era of fear in “Those Days” to the era of Joy and Peace in “This Day” is so utterly human: “*And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger,*” (Luke 2:7)

Jesus’ birth is just yet another unexceptional birth of a child to poor parents in a small, crowded town in the empire. No one in

any position of power would have even noticed.

This is the holy mystery of Christmas. That in the quiet, ordinary moments of our lives, the joy and presence of Christ can enter...at any time. Something new happens. There is often no fanfare. But *we* know the moment when it arrives, because the fear of Those Days dissipates, and the loving presence and peace of Christ, of *This Day* fills our hearts.

Friends, Christ is born today. THIS DAY is here. We’ve been waiting and waiting all Advent for it. Like the Shepherds, we walked into this sanctuary as a people worn and weary living in the fear of Those Days. But now we have heard the Good News. Will we leave here tonight living as if *unto us* is born THIS DAY, a Savior? The waiting is over. **Will we tell the world, that the times have changed, that Christmas Time is here?**

****Jerimiah playing a few measures of “Christmas Time is Here” by Vince Guaraldi.****

When you hear that song, what do you think of? (A *Charlie Brown Christmas*)

¹ Charles L. Campbell, “Luke 2:1-20: Homiletical Perspective,” eds. David L. Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 1 Advent*

through Transfiguration (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2009, 119.

² Campbell, *ibid.*

Since *A Charlie Brown Christmas* first aired in 1965, composer Vince Guaraldi's tune has been synonymous with the Peanuts Gang. You simply can't hear that melody without thinking of Charlie Brown and Linus trekking to the frozen winter lake, Linus' blanket dragging in the snow, as they join their friends Lucy, Schroeder, Peppermint Patty, Pig Pen, Snoopy on ice skates.

The song, a jazzy wintry melancholy mix—was originally written as solely an instrumental number, but producer Lee Mendelson decided it needed lyrics. He sat down at the kitchen table and wrote the lyrics himself on the back of an envelope in 10 minutes:³

*Christmas time is here
Happiness and cheer
Fun for all that children call
Their favorite time of the year
Snowflakes in the air
Carols everywhere
Olden times and ancient rhymes
Of love and dreams to share
Sleigh bells in the air*

³ Wernick, Adam "The music of Vince Guaraldi helped make 'A Charlie Brown Christmas' a cultural icon". *The World from PRX* (23 December 2014), retrieved 1 December 2021 and accessed on Dec. 24, 2024 at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_Time_Is_Here.

⁴ Lyrics accessed here:
<https://www.songfacts.com/lyrics/vince-guaraldi-trio/christmas-time-is-here>

*Beauty everywhere
Yuletide by the fireside
And joyful memories there⁴*

Derrick Bang, author of the biography *Vince Guaraldi at the Piano* writes nowadays, "Christmas just doesn't feel like Christmas without hearing that song."⁵ And the thing is, when you hear it, you don't think of Vince, you think of Charlie Brown and the Peanuts Gang. It's one of those songs, that immediately points to something beyond just the music itself. It has a living 'embodied' spirit, the whole spirit of the Peanuts gang. The minute you hear the melody—you picture the joy of that ice skating scene, Charlie Brown and Linus and Snoopy and friends.

I wonder, when folks look at our lives, when they hear the melody of our lives do they immediately think of Jesus? Do our actions invoke the joy and peace of the manger?

In order for its joy and truth and peace of Christmas Time to spread, the song needs

⁵ The Associated Press, "The jazzy 'Charlie Brown Christmas' soundtrack swings on after 57 years," *CPR News* (6 Dec. 2022), accessed on Dec. 24, 2024 at <https://www.npr.org/2022/12/06/1140893271/the-jazzy-charlie-brown-christmas-soundtrack-swings-on-after-57-years>.

lyrics. And our lives are those lyrics.

God was not made human in the life of Jesus just to toot God's own horn and get credit for being the composer of our lives. God came in human form so that we would have a living, human example, an image of what God's love looks like in the world. And so that we could emulate that loving example in such a way that, by our love, the world is transformed. So that the fear and power of "Those Days" is vanquished by the Truth and Joy of THIS DAY.

"Looking at Jesus—his teachings and his way of life—is our best clue to who God is...Jesus is uncanny in his resemblance to the Creator of all things, and he embodies the nature of reality itself—which is always and only LOVE...Christmas is a time to remember and recommit to being little Christs ourselves (which is the literally meaning of Christians). It's up to us to resemble as closely as possible the one who perfectly resembles the God who is in all, before all, and above all

things."⁶ The God who is, first and last, Love.

Life will try everything in its power to keep us in the fear of "Those Days." May we be the ones who sing through the lyrics of our lives the Good News: "*Unto you is born THIS Day, a Savior.*"

Christmas Time is Here. Christ has come. The powerful lords of our world do not have power over our lives and hearts, Jesus does.

Mendelson's lyrics to Christmas Time conclude with one final verse:

***Christmas time is here
We'll be drawing near
Oh, that we could always see
Such spirit through the year***⁷

May we be the ones who help the world see such spirit *through* the year. May we put the fear of THOSE DAYS behind us by cultivating the hope, peace, joy, and love of the Christchild born THIS DAY within us.

Christmas Time IS here.
May we live it all year.

Amen.

⁶ Email from Dr. George Mason to the Wilshire Resident Alumni on December 23, 2024.

⁷ Lyrics accessed here:
<https://www.songfacts.com/lyrics/vince-guaraldi-trio/christmas-time-is-here>