

Epworth Chapel on the Green
December 24, 2013
Christmas Eve
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Isaiah 9:2-7
Psalm 96
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-20

On a cold Christmas Eve night many years ago, when Korea was in the throes of civil war, a young pregnant woman stumbled down a village street, staggering back and forth and pleading with passersby to help her:

“Help me! Please, my baby,” she cried.

No one responded. No one paid attention. A middle aged couple walked by. The young woman reached out to them and said, *“please, my baby. Can you help me?”*

The middle aged woman pushed the young mother-to-be aside and said, *“get away from me. Go find the father. Where’s your American man now?”*

The young woman stopped and bent over, gripped by the pain of another contraction. *“Please,”* she sobbed. But the older couple briskly walked away.

The young woman had heard of a missionary in a nearby village who might help her. She got up and began walking in that direction, thinking and praying to herself: *“if only he will help my baby...”*

Shivering and in pain, she struggled to make her way along the frozen countryside. But the night was so cold. Snow began to fall. As she approached an old bridge, she could go no further. The baby was ready to come.

She gathered what strength she had left, and took shelter under the old bridge. And there, alone, on that bitter Christmas Eve night, her baby was born.

Worried about her newborn son, she removed her own clothes, wrapped them around the baby and held him close in the warm circle of her arms.

The next day, the missionary braved the new snow to deliver Christmas packages. As he walked along, he heard the cry of a baby. He followed the sound to the bridge. Under the bridge, he found the young mother – frozen to death. Her arms were still clutching her crying baby.

The missionary tenderly lifted the baby out of her arms, and took him home. When the boy was ten years old, his adoptive missionary father told him the story of his mother's death as she brought him into the world on Christmas Eve.

The next morning, the missionary rose early, and found his son's bed empty. Seeing a fresh set of small footprints in the snow outside, he bundled up in his winter coat and followed the trail. It led him back to the bridge where the young mother had died.

As the missionary approached the bridge, he stopped. There, kneeling in the snow, was his young son – naked and shivering uncontrollably. His clothes lay

beside him in a small pile. Through chattering teeth, he cried: “Mother, were you this cold for me?” (Pause)

On this night, we pause to worship and to give thanks. We join the voices of others through the ages in saying, “glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will toward men.” We hear the angelic voices saying to us: “fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”

But *both* the mother *and* the son in Luke’s narrative sacrificed a great deal before those glad tidings were proclaimed. After an arduous journey, Mary was not welcome in any of the cozy inns of Bethlehem. Instead, she delivered her baby in a dark, cold stable.

And the Son whom Mary delivered **left his home, his glory, and the warmth of heaven to be born in a stable to an unwelcome world.** The Creator, the King of the Universe, *arrived among us as one of us*, clothed only in the garments of human frailty and vulnerability.

This is surely worth pondering in our hearts. In the words of G.K.

Chesterton:

***There has fallen on earth for a token
A god too great for the sky.
He has burst out of all things and broken
The bounds of eternity:***

*Into time and the terminal land
He has strayed like a thief or a lover,
For the wine of the world brims over,
Its splendour is spilt on the sand.*

(From *Gloria in Profundis*)

May the force of these words, and the message from the angels to the shepherds, find a receptive place in our hearts on this cold, snowy, Christmas Eve.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.