



# Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

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**CHRISTMAS EVE SERMON**  
**LUKE 2:1-20**  
**DECEMBER 24, 2022**  
**"A CHRISTMAS CAROL"**

I've been a pastor for 23 years and I preached on Christmas Eve every one of those years. It has always been a humbling experience. As far as I remember, thanks to faithful parents, I have spent every one of my 63 Christmas' on this earth in a church on Christmas Eve worshipping singing songs I soon learned to love and learning at least one Aramaic language term - "Immanuel" – God with us. I still find it comforting and frankly amazing that so much of the world still does this – gather somewhere – in a home or under a tree or in a great cathedral to hear the story of Jesus' birth. This story has had, to say the least, staying power.

So as a lifelong Christian and now for roughly a third of my life a pastor I'm glad that whatever else may be said about faith and religion in America, for 36 hours or so, Jesus can still close shopping malls. I admit to having become resentful of the culture's influence on Christmas somewhere in my teens – "our Christian holy-day" that my church taught me tarnished by glitzy light displays and inflatable Santas and the endless parade of songs and Hallmark Channel movies that portray Christmas as no more than a *"season of love and good cheer."* After all, *"Santa knows that we're God's children, that makes everything right, so let's give thanks to the Lord above, for Santa Claus comes tonight."* And that he does.

But then a few years ago, while filling on gas, I listened as speakers embedded somewhere in a Kwik Trip gas pump started playing *"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"* – telling anyone taking on a load of unleaded to *"remember Christ your Savior was born on Christmas Day, to save us all from Satan's power while we were gone astray."* And I thought ...glory to God that Christmas has perhaps taken a hold of culture, and maybe not so much the other way around, and our happy, holy night of the Nativity of our Lord presents itself to the world still.

When I first saw the holiday film of films *"Home Alone"* I was embarrassed and a little miffed that the film showed a nearly empty church on Christmas Eve, perplexed that Kevin's family choose a holiday in France over celebrating what Christmas was really about, and sad that Kevin seemingly by accident stumbled into a church that night. But then I saw that Christmas could at least get a grumpy old man in church for an hour to ponder it's meaning, and that just might have been what brought about reconciliation with his estranged kids. Kevin wasn't the only person *"home alone"* on Christmas in other words.

So credit the film for this – it grasped that to such people as a grumpy old man who every kid in the neighborhood was scared of and who hadn't talked to his own kids in years over God only knows what, as well as to a barely if at all church kid like Kevin, that God not only did but wanted to come to earth. Or as the Christmas hymn *"I Wonder as I Wander"* says, *"for poor ornery people like you and like I."* That's the story Luke tells so plainly - and I cheer the effect that story still has and always will. How cool that gas pumps play hymns about it and even millions of people who aren't here tonight are celebrating in some fashion, singing if not *"Joy to the World"*, at least *"tis the season to be jolly...fa la la la la, la la la la"*

Even beyond the church, beyond *faithful folks like you and like I*, I marvel that Christmas of all the sacred days of the church, Easter included, continues to have this effect on the human race – somehow conveying, if only as rumor if not as among us a faithful confession, that God IS good and kind, or more precisely gracious and merciful, and is not through with any of us. Christmas for all else it has become still manages to get people to open their hearts and wallets if even a crack to fellow humans – to be themselves kind and good – or better gracious and merciful.

Mary's child is called Jesus which means "God saves." All who call upon that name will be. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a famous twelfth century teacher of the church said, *"For why else is he called Jesus, but that he will save his people from their sins...Why was the Son of God made a man but so he could make all children of God...if Jesus forgives, who can condemn...if Christ heals who can wound...if the Son of God exalts us by becoming like us, who can cast us down."*

In his novel "A Christmas Carol", Charles Dickens in one of his genuinely Christian scenes of the book, describes how a child, named Tim, frail as could be, came home from church with his father on Christmas Day, and was placed almost Christlike by his siblings in his chair to await the day's modest feast. *"How did Tim behave"* his mother asked his father, Bob Cratchit, and Bob said *"as good as gold... Somehow, he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me coming home that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day who it was who made lame beggars walk and blind men see."*

You think that might be a pleasant thing too this Christmas night – remember he who did that, he who knew no sin yet became sin for you, that you might become the righteousness of God? Is it a pleasant thing for you to know, in addition to all the other pleasant things of this day, that when angels sang praises to the glory of God the first Christmas night it was because they knew that God was pleased with folks made blind by sin – whose glory they cannot themselves see?

Ephesians 1:12 says those who hope in Christ are to the praise of his glory. That means your forgiveness and adoption as a child of God is literally a form of praise to God. You are God's praise! You don't even have to sing...forgiven one, to praise God. But it's Christmas night – and what else are we here for – thus rejoicing, free from sorrow, praises voicing, greet the morrow, Christ the child was born for you...yes...you. AMEN