

Children's Christmas Service Sermon
"Anti-Climactic Christmas"

This is a high point for many of us here right now. If not the children, then the proud parents and grandparents, cousins and friends. By comparison, the actual events of Christmas seem pretty anti-climactic.

Here's what I mean. God is preparing for the most important arrival of anyone in all of human history. And so God gets things ready with the opposite of a press conference inviting the most prestigious and most-listened to. He sends his messenger to an insignificant village you couldn't even locate on a map. This messenger appears inside the quiet home of a young woman of no particular importance or reputation. We know nothing about her parents before her or any of her descendants after her with the exception of this one whose coming is announced by the heavenly messenger.

She is God's special choice. So, of course, she gets the opposite of VIP maternity treatment. She is uprooted to the other side of the country with no hotel accommodations booked or even available. She is driven there by the proud impulses of a distant ruler over 1,000 miles away who simply wants to put specific numbers behind the specific majesty of his rule. His involuntary census requires this first time mother to take refuge in an animal shed.

Even the actual event, the actual climactic appearing of this special child is the ultimate in anti-climax. There are no reporters or birth photographers. No artists to preserve every moment with vivid realism. Even the account we get in the pages of Scripture leaves so much to the imagination - she gave birth and wrapped up her child warmly. Every sister and mother, each aunt and cousin is screaming for more information, more details, a step by step or hour by hour recap of how this miraculous birth went down. Instead, we just get this stoic reporting with the precision and brevity of a careful historian. No embellishment. No flourish.

Even if this event defies expectations, it has to be shared with someone. So God sends angels again to make his announcement. They appear out in the inky darkness of night to share this monumental news. But not to world leaders or talk show hosts, no celebrities or pop stars with millions of followers, not even a TED talk deliverer or Silicon Valley innovator. Religious leaders and spiritual heroes are nowhere in sight. Just blue-collar shepherds minding their own business in the isolation of a chilly night separated from society.

These shepherds receive a sign that the world's Savior has arrived. God has kept his promise. Prophecies dating back thousands of years are fulfilled. The hopes of peoples across continents and cultures are realized. The sign, the signal they would know they found God's promised Savior? Would it be some terrifying astronomical pyrotechnical display to wake the world and shatter the unaware from their slumber? Would it be an earth-heaving tremor to jolt awake even the most 'meh' observers? Would it be a record capacity crowd called together in a world capital? No. No. And no. A baby. A baby wrapped up. A baby resting in a feeding trough. But once they witness this amazing event, then we would expect impressive reactions. No again. Those shepherds simply saw, praised God and returned home.

And that's the way it is with God's glory. Anti-climactic in our understanding of how things are supposed to work. A Savior in the still puffy skin of a helpless infant. Rescue in the person of a rejected rabbi. A rabbi who surrounded himself with misfits and fishermen, gravitated toward prostitutes and despised tax collectors and outcasts. The ultimate vindication of God's chosen instrument to carry out his plan of salvation took place at the apparent defeat on the cross. The ultimate glory of Jesus in his horrendous humiliation. Of course his coming in the flesh would be anti-climactic. His work of securing peace with God came through the gut wrenching sound of nails being pounded through his hands, a spear driven into his side to show his heart had already given out. God's healing for troubled souls came when the lifeless body of Jesus was left as a warning dangling from that cross. All of this conspired to acquire our free pass into eternity through this most unexpected manner.

And maybe the anti-climactic trappings are all intentional. Maybe that's the point. Mary isn't important or impressive on the outside so you can imagine God choosing the teenager down the street. A census takes soon-to-be parents across the country to show how God still works when we think everything is messed up, all is ruined. A barn for a delivery room and a trough for a crib, to overturn our understanding of how God inserts himself in our world. His coming serves advance notice he won't be the conquering hero commanding armies and overturning world order with any sword, to serve notice the glory of God in the ordinary of Jesus' perfect obedience. Simple shepherds notify humble hearts are the only requirement to receive the Savior. Their return home to show lives changed by the appearance of the Savior don't need to embark on crusades, only live out the peace of reconciliation with God in our own homes and communities, and let God spread his peace from there.

So maybe it shouldn't surprise us that today the youngest among us will proclaim God's ultimate wisdom. That from the mouths of children God speaks to proclaim and convict and reveal his chosen plan to rescue his fallen world. Maybe today isn't anticlimactic at all, but the most appropriate method to fit in with God's miracle message.