

This Sermon was written by Rev. Gary Smith for the First Congregational Church

Christmas is a Sign that the World Must Continue

12-20-20

Luke 2:8-20

There is reason to be concerned for our world and our future. For many, the future looks bleak with the pandemic and knowing that we have a very long way to go to return to what was the norm. Other worries include financial insecurity, school shootings, and personal struggles. Someone said to me, with all that is happening around me, the end does not look so bad. Over the years I have had premarital counseling with couples. I asked, have you discussed having children and how many and to my surprise a number of couples said they don't know if they want to bring a child into this crazy world.

I think a baby is a sign of hope that the world should continue. There are children being born every day signally that life will go on; a family name carried forward, Christian values passed from one generation to another. Christmas is God's verdict that the world will go on. This is true because God continues to create life. Just look at nature. The snow in the mountain is white gold to us in Idaho as it provides water all year long. The sun continues to shine. I was reading of the possible natural disasters that could befall us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The worst would be the sun dying, then I read that it has enough fuel to last for five million years. I think we are safe on the sun front. Our great creator has provided for us. When we are feeling down and out, recall those life affirming words from the musical Annie, "The Sun will come out tomorrow." With the voice of faith, we sing, "The Son, SON will come to us tomorrow" and minister to the needs of the world.

We often times feel threatened and intimidated by our culture with instant media coverage of all the evil events transpiring in our world and seek security any way we can find it. But our ultimate security lies not in guns, weapons, and missiles but in the hands of God, in a special baby, who became the prince of peace. His birth is a sign that the world must continue and will be safer and better and more peaceful if we will believe in him and live his teachings.

For many Jews, their world had ended as they knew it at the time when the prophet received the message from God. They were defeated, deflated, a depressed people and many of them were being held captive in Babylon. Out of this despair, Isaiah received the prophecy that would give hope, "The Lord himself will give you a sign, the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel." They believed the prophet and in time they went home, back to Israel to rebuilt their homes and temple. Life was better but then later they were dominated by Rome.

One day during Roman rule, a notice was posted that everyone must return to their place of birth to be counted and taxed. Joseph and Mary traveled to Joseph's home of

Bethlehem even though she was nine months pregnant. When she gave birth in that cattle stall, a heavenly message went out to the shepherds, "This will be a sign to you, you will find the baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger."

It is helpful to note that the angels began their announcement with the words, "Do not be afraid, for I bring you good news of a great joy which will be for all people." In spite of the human circumstances we find ourselves in, because we are people of faith, we are not intimidated by the trials and tribulations of life. Jesus once said, "Do not fear, only believe." We are not afraid of the future because Christmas is the sign that God wants the world to go on and we will with our faith in him. We still have that good news of great joy.

I know of nothing which offers unsolicited and spontaneous love as much as a baby. There is something within the soul and personality of humanity, some call it a mother's or father's instinct that causes us to cherish, protect and nurture after the birth of a child. Baby Jesus came to show us how to love one another, pure and simple. In its simplest form, the Christmas story is that a baby came to our world to release the power of divine love.

God wants our world to continue and God wants us to live peaceably and joyfully. They go together and are inter-linked for our lives' and for the world's future existence. Throughout history there have been those who believed that our world was coming to an end immediately. Some were religious fanatics who sold all their possessions and waited for the end on a mountain top while others committed suicide attempting to escape this planet to land on a comet. These prophets of gloom and doom were all wrong. This world ultimately is not in our hands, but God's. Christmas is a sign from God that the world must go on as we are reminded that the Christ child has been born in our world to teach us how to live and love and experience joy beginning at Christmas.

The spirit of Christmas descends upon us and transforms us. It solicits and calls us to be more than we have been. It creates a desire within us to say and do things which are kinder, more generous than we usually say and do. It is not because we are having a birthday party but because the incarnation is a sign that life will go on and it will be of a spiritual quality because of Christ's life and teachings. And even when we reach the end of this existence, our lives will go on. Jesus came to give us life abundant and eternal. Life will continue and even when it is over for us, we will go on and live eternally with God and our loved ones who have preceded us.

Thanks be to God.

Merry Christmas

Gary Smith