

December 24, 2024 – Christmas Eve

“The Word Became Flesh” by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: Luke 2:1-20

Christmas can arrive when you least expect it, often in the most unexpected manner. Dr. James Dobson shares a story about an elderly woman named Stella Thornhope, who was struggling with her first Christmas alone. Her husband had passed away just a few months prior after a lengthy battle with cancer. Now, several days before Christmas, she was nearly snowed in by a brutal storm. She felt terribly lonely and, as a result, decided she wouldn't decorate for Christmas.

Late that afternoon, the doorbell rang. A delivery boy stood there holding a box. “Mrs. Thornhope?” he asked. She nodded. “Would you sign here?” he said. She invited him inside to escape the cold. After signing the paper, she asked, “What’s in the box?” The young man smiled, opened the flap, and revealed a tiny puppy—a golden Labrador Retriever. He picked up the squirming pup and explained, “This is for you, Ma’am. He’s six weeks old and completely housebroken.” The little puppy wriggled with joy at being freed from the box.

“Who sent this?” Mrs. Thornhope asked.

The delivery boy set the dog down and handed her an envelope. “It’s all explained in here, Ma’am. The dog was purchased last July, while its mother was still pregnant. It was meant to be a Christmas gift for you.” He also handed her a book titled *How to Care for Your Labrador Retriever*.

Still desperate for answers, Mrs. Thornhope asked, “Who sent me this puppy?”

As the young man turned to leave, he answered, “Your husband, Ma’am. Merry Christmas.”

Stella opened the letter from her husband. He had written it three weeks before his death and left it with the kennel owners to be delivered with the puppy as his last Christmas gift to her. The letter was filled with love and encouragement, urging her to stay strong. He reassured her that he was waiting for the day she would join him, and he sent the puppy to keep her company until that time.

Tears welled up in her eyes as she finished the letter. She set it down, then looked at the puppy at her feet. Smiling, she picked up the golden ball of fur and held it

close. Looking out the window at the Christmas lights on the neighbor's house, she heard the strains of "Joy to the World, the Lord Has Come" playing on the radio in the kitchen. At that moment, an overwhelming sense of peace washed over her, and her heart felt a joy and wonder greater than the grief and loneliness she had been experiencing.

"Little fella," she said to the dog, "it's just you and me. But you know what? There's a box down in the basement that I think you'd like. It's got a little Christmas tree, some decorations, and lights that will impress you. And there's a manger scene down there. Let's go get it."

This story reminds me that as we walk along the different paths of life, we all come to this Christmas with our own story. Some of us may arrive broken hearted, feeling the pain of losing someone dear. Perhaps we're still hurting from family divisions, financial stress, or the weight of a difficult diagnosis. On the other hand, some of us may arrive feeling blessed, complete, and happy. In either case, let's not forget to give thanks to God.

As we gather this Christmas, regardless of how we've arrived, let's remember that no matter the sadness we carry in our hearts, tonight we celebrate the birth of a God who joined us in the human experience—one that is full of sorrow, losses, suffering, and pain, but also filled with the joy, love, and happiness that God and life itself bestow upon us.

The story of Jesus' birth shows us the mystery of a God greater than anything we could imagine, a God who became one of us. Consider how the Gospel of John speaks of the baby in the manger:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:1-5)

This almighty, omnipotent God is the same one we remember and picture in our minds—lying in a manger, surrounded by his parents and the shepherds who heard the news of his birth from an angel. He came to experience the joys of life as a human being—to experience the love of a family, friends, and community—but also to endure the pains, sufferings, losses, and disappointments of life.

His birth began with an unwelcome order from an emperor, forcing a pregnant young woman and her husband to make a long journey to a faraway town for a census. They didn't go there of their own will. When they arrived in Bethlehem, there was no proper place for the delivery of the child. The Almighty God was born in a stable meant only for animals. Shortly after his birth, he became a refugee in Egypt. He was a child born to a homeless family, and the rest, as they say, is history.

When we talk about God's incarnation, we speak of God immersing Himself in the human experience—sharing in the tragedies, brokenness, and vulnerability of life, but also experiencing the love, joy, and happiness that we all cherish. His birth is the source of great joy for all Christians. On that night, there was joy in heaven. Angels sang in the sky, shepherds praised God with great joy, and a bright star shone over the child. The heart of a mother was filled with joy at the gift of her child. Their joy is our joy.

Out of that joy, we sing tonight and praise God, because we know that even in times of darkness, mourning, and suffering, God has a way of sending us a sign of light—reminding us that life is stronger than death, and His light is more powerful than darkness. **Amen.**