**Isaiah 9:2-7 (ESV)**

**2**  The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. **3**  You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. **4**  For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. **5**  For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. **6**  For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **7** Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

**Titus 2:11-14 (ESV)**

**11** For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, **12** training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, **13**  waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, **14**  who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

**Luke 2:1-20 (ESV)**

**1** In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** And all went to be registered, each to his own town. **4** And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, **5** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. **6** And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. **8** And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. **10** And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, **14**  “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” **15** When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

**“God’s Story IS Our Story”**

 In the Name of the One begotten from the Father from all eternity and born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ our blessed Lord and Savior. Amen. Christmas has many stories floating around today. They are playful and lighthearted, but that is about all. When we peel away the wrapping paper of Christmas, there is a story far more important for humanity. Rather than choosing from countless stories on Netflix or Hulu to escape from life. God’s story of love is life born right in a manger made right for all people. Instead of searching YouTube for the next viral video, see again how heaven rejoiced in the Virgin Mary’s Child. Jesus’ birth was a one-time event, but the annual celebration marks how God never had to hit the reset button.

 The children tonight helped us return to God’s story described by Martin Luther’s hymn, “From Heaven Above, To Earth I Come.” This is the 500th Christmas since the Reformation. That time in history should remind us how God’s story for a sinful world had been corrupted and even sadly lost. Yet, the Gospel remains to be that light no darkness can overcome. So the point of Christmas is as Jesus tells us, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). God’s story is unlike any other inviting us out of fantasy and bitterness of life into the story of faithfulness good for all times, places, and people.

1. **Consider the characters God uses to bring good cheer at Christmas.**
2. Joseph was no Tony Stark or John McClane come to save the day just faithful husband of Mary.
* However, to this diminishing line of king David God promised by His Word, “Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam 7:16).
1. Mary was not a princess or a 16-year-old Katniss from Hunger Games only a young virgin.
* Yet, she believed what the angel Gabriel told her confessing, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word (Luke 1:38).
1. **Look to how this plot of Christmas has God’s purpose in mind.**
2. Adam and Eve gave humanity a sad story, but God had better plans to intervene in history.
* He provided the answer long ago saying against Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15)
1. There is a real child, born in a real time, in a real place and His name was Jesus.
* During the reign of Caesar Augustus God came humbling Himself as the angels told the shepherds, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”
* Thirty-three years later, this Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate declaring at His trial, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world— to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” (John 18:37)
1. **Rejoice the credit of Christmas brings great hope for humanity from God.**
2. In a fallen world, there is hardship, grief and darkness so no wonder the shepherds were told to go to Bethlehem and we are to go to Christ’s Church.
3. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people” which now means Jesus by His Word and Sacraments wipes away tears, forgives guilt and shame, and lifts up hearts to hope in Him.

 The children only sang the first five verses of Luther’s fifteen-verse hymn. Guess like any pastor, he got carried away but can you blame him! In such unstable times, dark dangers, and looming sadness God provided the story no darkness can silence. The last verse of Luther’s hymn serves us well even today! “Glory to God in the highest heaven, who unto us His Son has given. While angels sing with pious mirth (laughter) a glad new year to all the earth.” God’s story is unlike any other inviting us out of fantasy and bitterness of life into the story of faithfulness good for all times, places, and people. Amen. In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.