

SERMON

First Lutheran Church

Aitkin, Minnesota

Luke 3:1-22

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January 8, 2017

ADULT MESSAGE

The Christmas Babe in a manger – **Jesus came into our world looking for you.** We have been celebrating **Christmas** – when Jesus was born into a family and a world where poverty was well known. We have just recognized **Epiphany**, January 6th, where we recall the Wise Men following a star to find the new born king - Jesus. During this season of **Epiphany**, Jesus is revealed to us as the **Light of the World** shining in even the darkest places that we could ever find ourselves. Today we celebrate the **Baptism of our Lord** where rough and tumble John the Baptist baptizes Jesus, and God above sends the Holy Spirit and the promise and blessing of Jesus' mission. **Mission?** Jesus has come to love and to save you and me and all of the other lost and wandering souls of this world. **Jesus came into this world looking for you.**

The Gospel of Luke clearly grounds Jesus coming in the political and religious history and power of that time two thousand years ago – naming emperor, king, governor and Jewish leaders. Luke says that Jesus' coming will move mountains and valleys and roads. Luke says that Jesus' coming will impact every person in this world – then, now and forever.

The little Babe will bring **judgment**. This world is **not moving in the life-giving, life-affirming direction** that God created it for. People are **not living in the love/trust relationship with God** that we were created for. People are **not caring for each other and the creation** as God intended. Luke's words were recorded two thousand years ago, but they still speak to our own day as well.

The Babe will bring judgment, but the Babe will also bring "**Good News.**" Jesus' birth, baptism, life – these are **signs of God's faithful commitment not to give up** on this world or on human beings. God, two thousand years ago, and yet today, will **not let our lack of faith**, our **sin** or our **broken world** stop God from coming

again and again and forever – to love and care for us. Jesus came into this world looking for you.

So, the Babe grew up. Adult Jesus shows up at the Jordan River where John the Baptist has been announcing and preparing for the coming of God’s Messiah, the Savior. You heard Luke’s account. The **heaven was opened**. In Jesus’ day, the people believed that the earth was covered by a “**firmament**,” – basically a soup bowl turned upside down. The sun, moon and stars hung suspended from the firmament. There were windows in the firmament which God could open and close to allow rain to fall down and water the earth. Do you see the soup bowl? Picture this. At the time of Jesus’ baptism, God **opened the heaven/ the firmament**, and God’s own Holy Spirit came down and entered Jesus. But wait, the word “**opened**” can also be translated “**ripped apart**.” **God ripped apart the heavens** so that the Holy Spirit could descend upon Jesus. Then God spoke, “**You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased**.” Jesus hadn’t performed any miracles yet. He hadn’t forgiven any sins or fed any hungry people. He was just starting his mission, his salvation work, yet God was pleased with God’s beloved Son. **Jesus is God’s plan for our lives and salvation**. God has given God’s very best, God’s own self in **love, compassion and grace**. God’s love, compassion and grace in Jesus have come for you. And **God in Christ is pleased to be here for you** and for all people.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the early Christians in Rome (Romans 8), tells us that there is **nothing that can separate us from the love of God** which is ours through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul goes through a whole grocery list of the world’s powers – **political, religious, sin, death** and the **power of evil** – and promises that **none of these, not any or all of these**, can separate us from the **love, compassion and grace** that Jesus brings into our world. For you. **There is no wall that God will let stand between you and God’s love for you**.

The heavens were ripped apart. The sins of **Roman occupying soldiers** who oppressed them, and of **Jewish tax collectors** who collected their money and gave it to the enemy, and the **wickedness of a puppet king** who killed his own sons to

stay in power – **none of these could stop God** from ripping through the heavens and coming into our everyday world. A bleak manger birth couldn't stop God. Living as a helpless child in a refugee family couldn't stop God. The weight of the world and spikes nailed through wrists and ankles couldn't stop God.

Do you remember? When Jesus died on the cross, the earth quaked and the curtain of the temple was "**torn in two.**" It's that "**open**" word again. (**Raise curtain.**) The curtain of the temple is what stood between God and God's people in Jewish faith and practice. Behind the curtain was the footstool of God, God Almighty, God to be feared, God who was so good and holy that even the sight of God would consume mere mortals with fire. When Jesus died on the cross, God ripped that separating curtain in two. (**Rip!**) No more would God allow some sort of barrier to stand between God's people and God's love for them. God is well-pleased with Jesus because **Jesus is God's loving, compassionate, grace-filled plan** to save you and me and all people. And Jesus is here. And nothing is going to stop Jesus from coming to you with God's love and care.

God ripped open the heavens to come to you and me. Some of us have **lost our job** and are wondering what will happen next. That could be a wall between us and God's love. But God won't let it stand! (**Rip!**) Some of us are struggling in our **marriage relationships**. That could make us feel like God doesn't love us. But God won't let it! (**Rip!**) Some of us are facing **health challenges** – cancer, diabetes, heart problems or chemical dependency. These could make us feel abandoned by God. But God won't let that wall stand! (**Rip!**) Some of us are struggling with the **limitations of aging** and are troubled by what living arrangements we might have to adapt to. This heart-rending struggle could leave us feeling like we're all alone. But, God won't let us stay that way! (**Rip!**) Some of us are sitting in **jail cells** with no idea of what the future might hold in store. It can't get much lonelier than that. But God won't abandon us there either! (**Rip!**) Some of us are worried about the **future of our country**. But no matter what happens, it can't keep God's love and care from moving in this great land either. (**Rip!**)

No heavenly firmament, no temple curtain, no power of sin or evil, not even death can keep God from ripping through the dividing walls of our world to love and care for us. To dwell with us. To draw us close to God.

God's salvation plan isn't to make us good enough to go to heaven. God's salvation plan is to **love, embrace, forgive, heal,** and **care for us** right now, again and again, and forever. There is no better good news as we enter this new year. And **God wants every last person to hear** and embrace God's invitation to life. And that's why God is busy ripping apart dividing walls. **Is there some sort of a wall standing between you and God's love** for you right now? **Are you ready for that wall to fall?** **God is.** Thanks be to God. Amen.