

Christ Community Covenant Church
Down to Earth: “Imagine Christmas”
Pastor Dave Scherrer - Christmas Eve, December 24, 2016

Last week during our wonderful Christmas musical presentation of Down to Earth, I briefly mentioned the manger scene. How inspiring and captivating that moment is freeze framed in the crèche. But really, imagining the manger scene at the first Christmas is something else. The King. Royalty wrapped in rags. Majesty in a manger. Holiness in the filth of sheep manure and straw. The Creator of the universe now dependent upon a teenaged girl and an overworked carpenter. Genius, pure genius.

One of the things I love most about Christmas is that it has a way of stirring our hopes and dreams. If we let it, Christmas has a way of releasing our creativity and our imagination.

Let me ask all you kids in the room right now: How many of you would say that you've got a really big imagination? What about you, parents? Would you say that you have creative kids that have big imaginations, vivid imaginations? (So what happens to us that as we age we get less imaginative? That's kinda sad I think.)

I was a kid like that. I had a vivid imagination. God wired me up as a creative type, plus I was the youngest so I could get away with stuff. My older brother and sister wore my parents out!

So since I was on my own, I used my imagination a lot. I had an imaginary lamb that went everywhere with me, much to the disgruntlement of my dad, who more than once had to go back to a house we had left so that I could go back and get my lamb. My friends played 'war' as though war would be fun and we chucked dirt clods and which we called 'grass bombs' at each other as though they were hand grenades. I just had this vivid imagination. That wasn't always good; we tried to make hand grenades out of molten lead and firecrackers once. That did not end well.

When I was a kid I spent hours upon hours by myself out in the driveway, dribbling and shooting a basketball and dreaming of someday playing high school and college ball. In my dreams interestingly enough I was always shooting for the win and scoring. I would even do the play-by-play stuff where the announcer is checking down the seconds... Only five ticks on the clock. Down by one. Five, four, three, two, one. Scherrer lets it go, it's off the back rim and straight up and . . . It's good! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!

I actually still do that. You see, I never want to grow out of the ability to dream. I never want to lose the capacity to hope and to ponder and to wonder and to imagine.

The Bible talks a lot about hopes and dreams and imagination. One of those times is in the Christmas story. Remember when the shepherds come and tell the young family with the just born child about all that they had seen and what the angel had told them of Jesus? After all the flurry of the birth activity, we read - *But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them – in her heart.* She tried to make sense of it all. She soaked in the moment. She cradled her newborn son. And she imagined just what God might be up to in her life. I bet she thought: “I never dreamed it would be like this. This is crazy, this is beyond my wildest imagination.”

What makes the manger scene so compelling I think is that it is a collection of mostly ordinary people thrust into this extraordinary divine moment. Yeah, there are some kings and angels but really this is just kinda simple people found in the middle of an amazing spiritual drama.

Let's think about those angels for a moment. Can you imagine what it must have felt like to be one of the angels actually chosen to announce to the world the greatest news of all time – to be able to say to people that God had become a baby people? Peace on earth, good will to all – men, women, boys and girls. Gloria in excelsis Deo. Glory to God in the Highest. O little town of Bethlehem, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

Can you imagine what a thrill it must have been for those shepherds to hear that news before anybody else? Shepherds were the lowest of the low class. They worked a dead-end, minimum wage kind of job, living with sheep day in and day out. If you think about it, shepherds weren't paid to be imaginative. They were apt to focus on the here and now and the right here, right now was sheep and goats. Nothing spectacular ever happened in their lives. They were never first; they were never regarded; they were never recognized. But on this night God chose them to be the very first people on the planet to hear that a Savior has been born just down the road. **Imagine that!**

I heard about a church's children's Christmas pageant, the kind with little kids in bathrobes and such. This one little boy got the part of the innkeeper, and he wasn't real happy about it because he had tried out for Joseph and didn't get it. So he decided in his own mind that when Joseph and Mary would show up at the inn, he was going to ruin the whole play. So when Joseph knocked on the door, he swung open the door and Joseph said, "Do you have any room?" And the innkeeper said, "We've got lots of room. Come on in."

And the little guy playing Joseph was a real quick thinker. He sticks his head in the door, looks around, comes back out and says, "There's no way I would bring my wife into a dump like this. Come on, Mary, let's go to the barn."

Can you imagine what it must have been like to be Joseph? To be standing in a stable, going: I feel like such a loser; this is the best I can do for my pregnant wife? And for 9 months to hear your buddies say stuff like: Your fiancé's pregnant. God's baby? Come on, wake up and smell the Starbucks, buddy; you need to dump her.

Imagine having the competence and the character of Mary. Imagine the faith she had in God. To be able to say: You know what? I don't get it all, I don't even understand anything really, but I will put my trust in the one whose Word never fails.

Can you imagine being Mary? To know that the Son of God is in growing inside you? To go through the labor and the pain and breathing and the pushing and the thrill of hearing the cries of God as he enters the world through you?

Can you imagine being Jesus' parents? Changing God's diaper? Giving the Creator tips on carpentry? Now remember, Jesus, measure twice and cut once. Yea, I got it, Dad. To look across the table going: That's God eating my meatloaf? I can't believe this.

Living Creche

Can you imagine standing on the banks of the Jordan River one day when the same young man, now 30 years of age, slips down into the murky waters and a voice from heaven says, *this is my much loved Son with whom I am well pleased* (Matthew 3:17).

Can you imagine sitting on a hillside one day, listening to him as he teaches like no one you've ever heard before, saying things like:

Blessed are the meek, the humble, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after God, for they will be filled. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God (Matthew 5:5-6, 9).

And don't judge...If you're going to try to take the speck of sawdust out of your brother's eye, make sure you take the plank out of your own eye first (Matthew 7:1, 5).

Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39).

Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44).

Those of you who hear my words and put them into practice are like the wise man who built his house on the rock (Matthew 7:24).

Can you imagine being in the crowd that day when Jesus takes two little fish and five biscuits and feeds all 5,000 of you until you're stuffed? (Matthew 14:13-21).

Can you imagine sitting on the boat in the middle of a violent storm thinking: this is it; we're dead? And then an exhausted Jesus is wakened and speaks to the wind and the waves: "Knock it off!" And they go to glass. And you say: "Who is this?" (Matthew 8:23-27).

Can you imagine lining the streets of Jerusalem on that day when this same man, this good man, this kind man, this man who touched the untouchable and embraced the sinner and stood up for the oppressed, is now being led up a hill to be crucified as a criminal? (Matthew 27:31-33).

Can you imagine that little baby that cried out in a barn in Bethlehem now crying out from a cross? *It is finished* (John 19:30). What I came to do is done.

And just imagine that all of this was done for you.

Well, you don't have to imagine – because it's true. God came looking for you. *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life* (John 3:16).

Imagine that.

Christmas is about a God who longs to be with us, who longs to forgive our sin and wipe away our past and give us a fresh start; a God who longs to do life with us every day.

Imagine what it would be like to be able to bring a selfless, unconditional love into your marriage – maybe for the first time.

Imagine what it would be like to have the courage and the humility to finally forgive your dad, your mom, your children, your family.

Imagine that you have found yourself at church after so long a time away and you say to yourself not, "I really miss this" but "I really miss Him."

Imagine what it would be like to show up for Christmas dinner without a knot in your stomach.

Imagine what it would feel like to walk free from guilt and regret and those old memories that haunt you.

Imagine how good it would feel to be clean and sober and released from the grip of an addiction that has been screwing up your life for way too long.

Imagine what it would be like to walk through your day overflowing with joy like the shepherds, because you've come to realize that maybe you're not so insignificant after all.

And imagine what it would be like to live with a sense like Joseph and Mary had that every day God is with you.

Well, you're saying that I'm letting my imagination run wild now because your life could never be like that. That's what I used to think too.

I told you in the Bible the word 'imagine' is used a couple of times in the New Testament. One is in Luke 2:19. The other is found in Ephesians 3:20 and it simply says that we have a God *who is able to do immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine*.

With God, nothing is impossible. God can do immeasurably more in your life. And the good news is that he wants to. He wants to. That's why he came. That's why he was born; that's why he lived a sinless life. That's why he walked up the hill to a cross to pay the penalty for our sin – so our lives could be full and free and forgiven and forever.

And he's just waiting this Christmas for you to embrace his gift of grace and invite Jesus Christ to come into your life.

How do you do that? It just starts with a simple, childlike faith. It begins with an honest prayer from an honest heart – no formula, no ritualistic rote kind of thing. It's just an honest prayer where you say: Jesus, I believe that you are the Son of God. I want to thank you for coming here to die for me so that I could be put right with God. And right now, I just want to ask you to come into my life and forgive my sin. I invite you to be my King.

Let me ask you: What better time than Christmas 2016 to pray that kind of prayer? Right now in this very moment, your life could start to change. Imagine that.