

## **An Extraordinary Visit**

Today is the first Sunday of Advent and we begin our focus upon the birth of Christ, the incarnation. Just to say the words, that God became man and dwelt among us, still startles me! What astonishing truth, what amazing love.

This is the 25<sup>th</sup> Advent series I've preached at this church. I look back every year to see what has been said, trying to find new ways to remind us of the same astounding and blessed truth of Christ's birth.

I've called this message An Extraordinary Visit. Some thoughts may sound familiar to you and some may be new. My hope is that these messages will help to keep our attention focused upon what is really important at this Christmas season.

Before I share this message, I want to tell you about an opportunity we have. Each year in the fall we have taken a Sunday to focus on the ministry of Speed the Light, the missions arm of Assemblies of God youth. We are going to receive an offering this morning for STL to help our youth with their faith promise, and more importantly to help equip our missionaries around the world with the tools they need to carry out their mission.

Most of you know that Speed the Light funds are used to purchase vehicles of all kinds, sound and lighting equipment, computers, almost any kind of equipment or resource that will help our missionaries share the gospel in their particular part of the world. Millions are given each year, but each year requests and needs out-weigh what is given. Your gift today can help make the difference in someone's eternity. I'm asking the ushers to come and I want us to bless our missionaries today and help our youth with this special Speed the Light offering.

As we give, I want to go ahead and share these thoughts with you. I began to prepare for this Christmas series and realizing that I was going to receive a special missions offering today, I began to think about the appropriateness of these two things together. You see Christmas is all about missions. The incarnation, the birth of Christ and his coming into this world is the greatest missions story ever told. Jesus said the reason he came was to seek and to save the lost. That's what missions is all about. So the story of Christmas is the story of missions.

Christmas is the celebration of the coming of the Christ, the Son of Man. Think

about his coming. Of course it is extraordinary – conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, a young Jewish girl from Nazareth, an obscure little village on the other side of the world from us. But it's not just the details of his birth that are so extraordinary, it is the idea itself, that God became man and dwelt among us. That he humbled himself and took the form of a servant to be with us. How extraordinary.

There is an interesting passage in Psalms that I want to share with you. Turn with me to Psalm 8. It may seem like an unusual passage for an advent message, but look with me at these verse. **“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” Psalm 8:1-4**

It is a beautiful passage, but it is that last verse that I want to talk about. “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” That word translated as “care for” is from a Hebrew word that means “to visit.” The King James Version translates it as **“What is man that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?”** The passage is quoted in the New Testament in Hebrews 2:6 and the word used in Greek means “to visit”, to go see someone.

The idea is that you care enough to come and visit, to be with this person, to help them, to visit them if they are sick and in need. The idea of visiting and caring are joined together. Our children's pastor and his wife, Aaron and Erika had a new baby girl born this past Tuesday. You know who came to visit? Erika's parents. It really doesn't matter if you said they came to care for their daughter and granddaughter or they came to visit their daughter and granddaughter, the outcome is the same.

The Psalmist asks the question, “Who are we that God would come to visit us?” Good question. Who are we and why would he come? I said the story of Christmas was the greatest missions story ever told. What was his mission? What was the reason for his coming? Why pay us a visit?

Let me ask you a simple question: Why do you visit anyone? You come to visit in order to get to know one another, to build a relationship, to learn about each other.

You come to visit to care for some one when they are sick or hungry or hurting. You come to visit just to let someone know you love them, you care about them, you were thinking of them. You come to visit people at the difficult times in their life, when someone is in the hospital or someone has died. There are a host of reasons for a visit. I think Jesus came to visit us for some of these same reasons. Let me show you what I mean.

**1. Jesus visited us so we could know the Father.** The God revealed in the Old Testament was the God who dwelt in smoke and fire on the mountain. The people of Israel respected and feared God, but I don't know that they really knew him. They told Moses, "You speak with him and let us know what he says. We will honor and fear him," but they didn't really know him.

Jesus came to reveal the Father to us. John is referring to the Christ in his gospel when he writes, "**No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.**" **John 1:18** Jesus said, "**Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.**" **John 14:9**. The book of Hebrews declares, "**The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being...**" **Hebrews 1:3**

Brennan Manning in his book *Ruthless Trust* writes, "...we must deduce everything about God from what we know about Jesus. This implies that all of our prevailing images and understandings of God must crumble in the earthquake of Jesus' self disclosure." Jesus paid us a visit so we could know the Father. Why would Jesus visit us?

**2. Jesus visited us to establish a relationship with us.** Jesus visited us so we could know the Father and so we could enter into a real relationship with him. It's part of the reason people pay each other a visit isn't it? To establish and build a relationship. We get to know each other as we visit, especially when we visit in each other's homes. Jesus came to say, "You can know the living God, personally. He will be your Father and you can get acquainted and know him and have a relationship with him through knowing me. Jesus said, "**I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**" **John 14:6**.

**3. Jesus visited us because we were hungry and in need.** It's another of the

reasons we visit someone isn't it? We care about the needs of others. We heard someone didn't have food so we paid them a visit and took a basket of groceries. Jesus knew we were spiritually starving to death. Jesus came to visit us, the hungry and the thirsty and said, **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."** John 6:35

Jesus came to visit us, the folks burdened down and in need and said, **"Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you shall find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."** Matthew 11:28-30

We haven't forgotten why he paid us a visit have we? He came because we were lost, alone, we didn't know God, we were starving and needy and we could not save ourselves. We desperately needed that extraordinary visit from a heavenly visitor. Who are we that God would send his son to visit and care for us? We are his people, created in his image. Why would he visit us?

#### **4. Jesus visited us in order to show God's love for us in a most dramatic way.**

God so loved us that he gave his only Son. Jesus came to declare his love and the love of the Father for a lost and dying world. He came to give his life as a ransom for us. Jesus said, **"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."** John 15:13.

Why would he come to visit us, to care for us? Because he loved us. And He showed that great love for us in this, that **"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** Romans 5:8

**5. Jesus came to visit us because of a death.** I said that is one of the reasons people come to pay a visit, when there has been a death. Jesus came because of a death, first ours, and then his. He came because of the death of the whole human race. We lost our relationship with the Living God. The bible says we were dead in our trespasses and sins. We were spiritually dead, without hope. How we needed a visit from one who would love us and care for us, who could redeem us and deliver us from death and bring us to life.

Hear the words of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, **"Blessed be the**

**Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David his servant.” Luke 1:68-69.**

He came to visit because of our death. We were dead in our sins. In addition, He came to visit us because of another death: his own. He came to die, to give his life as a ransom for our sins, to die in our place so that we might have everlasting life. “God has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people!” What a visitor and what a visit.

There was no question we needed a visit, but for this visitor, the visit required something extraordinary. The effort required for us to visit someone is minimal. A little time and a little energy expended. But for this heavenly visitor, giving time and going personally required a monumental sacrifice. He is eternal and timeless, yet he would confine himself to a time and place in 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel.

When we realize his greatness, we can begin to realize and appreciate the cost involved in his visiting us. Quoting Brennan Manning again, he wrote, “No matter how much he is like us, no matter how many attitudes, values and human characteristics we share in common, Jesus is also altogether different from us. In the depth of his personality he is divine, totally Other, and the glory of God rests upon Him. Jesus remains as mysterious in his nearness as he is in his transcendence.”

Jack Hayford wrote, “Here is the eternal One, planning to give us time. The omnipresent One preparing to confine himself to one place; and the omniscient One, who, knowing all things, still comes to learn of life on the terms of his own creation.”

The One who is beyond time, who fills all time and eternity and even transcends it; the one who is described as Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end; the past, present and future reside in him. This one declares that he will visit us. And in this act of incredible condescension, he lays aside that part of his nature that we call eternal and takes up the restriction of a 33 year measure of time with which to visit us.

Why not do it all in one second? Why take so much time with us? Because it requires time to identify with the ones he came to visit and to save. It wasn't a one day photo-op with a heavenly celebrity where Jesus dropped in, said “Hello, God loves you, just wanted to let you know.” It was a real life lived in real relationship. It was God in

the flesh dwelling among us so we could know him.

How incredible, that God loved us so much that he chose to allow himself to be walled in by the restrictions of time in order to be our high priest, the visitor who was tempted in all points like us, yet without sin.

Understand as well, for God to visit us in this fashion, he had to become visible to us. He came to visit us on terms we could understand. He could have declared from the heavens, "I am among you, reach out to me." Instead, he came to be among us – the ones he came to visit – us!

We cannot touch a spirit, so the one who spans the galaxies, the one who is creator of all things, limited himself to a place, to a time, and to the flesh of a baby. He chose to experience the growing pains of childhood, to learn what it means to be submitted to parents and elders. He chose followers, disciples who walked the hills with him as he taught them. He felt the press of the crowd. He touched the lepers, he saw the sick and dying, he experienced the sting of betrayal and the agony of the crucifixion.

Hayford says it so well. **“Christ placed omniscience into the schoolroom of human experience. He who knows all, acknowledged his desire to learn, to discover human pain in a human body, to feel human disappointment with human emotions, and to suffer human misunderstanding. He might simply have asserted His perception of these human sensations. His justice would have been no less righteous. He would not have been less loving, less holy or less God had he never submitted to these things. But he did submit. And in coming, he accepted these restrictions: “Though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered.” Hebrews 5:8. No wonder the psalmist marvels, ‘What is man that you visit him?’ The eternal One confined himself to time. The omnipresent one confined himself to one place. The omniscient one chose to learn the frailty of humanity.” – Jack Hayford** What a visitor and what a visit. O lord, our lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth.

We can't begin to truly understand what it means, that he would visit us. We have no way of really understanding what he left and what he laid aside to visit us and accomplish redemption for us. There is no way we can compute the distance between eternity and Bethlehem's manger, between heaven's glory and Calvary's cross. There

is no formula that allows us to discover the price he paid. There is no way to measure the weight, the burden that he bore as he took upon flesh and dwelt among us so he could give his life to redeem us.

What is man that you visit him? How humbling it is to know that he visited us in order to show us the Father, to redeem us, to share his love and his life with us. He came to die for us so that we might have eternal life through him.

He loves you. He came to save you and to give you life. Are you ready to receive him as your savior and Lord? Are you ready to say goodbye to a life of death and embrace that eternal life that comes through Christ? He has come to visit you.

Revelation 3:20 says, **“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.”**

**Revelation 3:20** He has come for a visit and he wants to stay forever. Will you open the door and let him in? It will be the most extraordinary visit you’ve ever experienced.