## Jeremiah 33:14-16

33:14 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

33:15 In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

33:16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

## Psalm 25:1-12 (NLT)

1O Lord, I give my life to you.

2I trust in you, my God!

Do not let me be disgraced,

or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat.

3No one who trusts in you will ever be disgraced,

but disgrace comes to those who try to deceive others.

4Show me the right path, O Lord;

point out the road for me to follow.

5Lead me by your truth and teach me,

for you are the God who saves me.

All day long I put my hope in you.

6Remember, O Lord, your compassion and unfailing love,

which you have shown from long ages past.

7Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth.

Remember me in the light of your unfailing love,

for you are merciful, O Lord.

8The Lord is good and does what is right;

he shows the proper path to those who go astray.

9He leads the humble in doing right,

teaching them his way.

10The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness

all who keep his covenant and obey his demands.

11For the honor of your name, O Lord,

forgive my many, many sins.

12Who are those who fear the Lord?

He will show them the path they should choose.

## 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

3:9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you?

3:10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

3:11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you.

3:12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.

3:13 And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

## Luke 1:1-25

1 Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1%3A1-25&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24889a)] to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. 7 But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

8 Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. 10 Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. 11 Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. 13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. 14 You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. 16 He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” 18 Zechariah said to the angel, “How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.” 19 The angel replied, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”

21 Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. 22 When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. 23 When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

24 After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, 25 “This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.”

## Sermon

Prayer:

In the words of Jeremiah, “The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I have made.” Thank you Jesus that you have come already. Thank you for your pormises. Trusting your promises, we expectantly wait for your coming again.

In the words of Paul from 1 Thessalonians

“And may our faithful God so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus.”

Faithful God, we wait now for you to come to us and touch us as we are gathered here today. Speak to us and strengthen us. Amen

All of Luke’s Gospel has the goal that the reader can say what the two disciples, at the very end of the Gospel, on their way to Emmaus said: Luke 24:32 “Did not our hearts burn within us as Jesus talked with us on the way and opened to us the Scriptures?”

But our passage for today is not even about Jesus so how are our hearts supposed to be buring?

Well, Luke did not think about you and me as he was writing,

the gospel of Luke is not written to us but it is nevertheless written for us.

Luke addresses this to whom? Theophilus

This is a greek name, guess what it means, lover of God

So this is written for all those who are lovers of God.

The passage that we read for today is part of the so called infancy narrative.

These passages are some of the most well known in all of Scritpure but their meaning has been obscured presicely because they have been singled out as cute and romantic stories told and retold over and over again during the Christmas season.

Luke’s structure helps us see what he is trying to communicate with these stories.

 In 1:5-2:52 Luke “alternates between John and Jesus in narrating their annunciations, births, circumcisions, and coming of age.”

Our passage for today included the introduction to the whole Gospel, verses 1-4.

Then we have the annunciation of John’s birth to Zechariah in ch. 1:5-25.

After our passage for today comes the annunciation of Jesus’ birth to Mary.

Mary then meets Elizabeth, both of them get excited and Mary sings this song that we know as the Magnificate.

Then Luke tells us about the birth of John giving rise to Zechariah’s song. (1:57-80)

No surprise, following the pattern, Luke then narrates the birth of Jesus in 2:1-21.

Luke alternates the stories of John and Jesus because he wants us to see that Jesus is not the first baby being born that is part of what God is doing in this world!

We see this throughout God’s story with this world as recorded in Scripture.

The birth of a baby signals a new beginning.

Luke wants us to know that Jesus was a baby like you and me once were babies.

It seems to me that we have forgotten what Christmas is all about.

Not our culture, not those out there, us, we as the church seem to be fuzzy about what Christmas is about.

What Luke is trying to communicate about the birth of Jesus is not cute or fun or sentimental.

We live in a very different time than Luke. We think differently.

Luke’s original readers, most of them would not have been able to read at all!

Those Luke wrote to, those who were in Luke’s mind as he was writing, most of them, would not have read his account but listened to it as someone read the whole Gospel out loud all in one piece.

And because of their cultural context, they would have been able to hear the whole Gospel of Luke together as one unit.

They would have remembered and seen the connections between the first and the last chapter.

I don’t know about you but if I were to read through Luke’s Gospel all at once, I would not be able to remember the first chapters when reading the last.

The problem is that we think about Christmas in terms of a cute story about a baby because we do not see this story of a baby being born in connection with what this baby later on in life teaches and then how this baby, once 30 years old or so, dies on the cross.

The story of Jesus being born divorced from Jesus’ teaching, death, and resurrection is meaningless.

Of course, it makes sense to focus on parts of the story at different times but we can only focus on something if the overall story forms the background.

Only when we account for all of Jesus’ life and teaching, only then can we focus on particular parts of the story.

With all those different pictures there, we can focus on Jesus birth but when we single out the story of Jesus birth, what happens?

What happens when you single out this one part of Jesus life?

Well, when we single out just this one part of Jesus’ life, we loose the ability to focus on it.

We can only focus on the significance of Christmas when we see the birth of Jesus within the larger story of what God is doing in this world.

I keep hearing the same thing from people: I wish I could focus more on what Christmas is all about rather than running around looking for gifts.

It seems like everyone agrees that the hectic and stress leading up to Christmas is not helpful.

But why do we keep doing the same expecting different results.

I think we are not able to focus on what Christmas is all about because we gave up the ability to focus on the significance of Christmas by singling out the birth of Jesus from the rest of the story.

What would you say if someone approaches you on the street, perhaps your neighbour, and asks you, so apparently there is some kind of Good News. What is the Good News about Jesus?

What comes to your mind when you hear the word salvation?

What has Jesus done for you?

What is the central message of the church about Jesus?

Have you ever asked yourself how what Jesus has done 2000 years ago has anything to do with you today?

How can Jesus possible save us?

I ask these questions because we will not be able to answer them in a deeply satisfying way without appreciating the significance of Jesus birth.

As I mentioned earlier, singling out the Christmas story, ironically, has left us unable to focus on and thereby grow in our understanding of what Christmas is all about.

We must come to appreciate what Christmas is all about otherwise what Jesus has done for us on the cross, and what God has done for us by raising Jesus from the dead, will remain distant from our lives as we experience it.

So what is Christmas all about???

With his Gospel, Luke paints a very nuanced picture of Jesus and the parts related to Jesus’ birth are a part of this bigger picture.

But we can only focus on Jesus birth if the narrative about the birth of Jesus is seen as a part of the larger picutre.

Of course, when we focus on specific parts we are than enabled to appreciate the full picture in a way that we have not before.

By setting Jesus’ and John’s annunciations, births, circumcisions, and coming of age side by side, Luke invites us to compare the two and see the differences and similarities.

On the one had, Jesus is like John, born of a human mother, both their births had been announced, both were circumcised and yet there are key differences.

Jesus is a human just like you and me.

And yet Jesus is also fully God.

When we think about the origin of John and Jesus, a difference emerges.

John comes from Elizabeth and Zechariah.

Jesus comes from Mary and the Holy Spirit.

In other words, while John is “only” fully human, Jesus is fully human and fully God.

What God has done for us in and through Jesus on the cross is meaningful for humans because in Jesus the human and divine come together without either the human or the divine being compromised.

This is what we celebrate during Christmas. The coming together of God and humanity.

This coming together is only possible in and through Jesus.

What Jesus has done on the cross remains meaningless apart from this coming together of God and humanity in Jesus Christ.

There is no salvation without this coming together of God and humanity in Jesus Christ.

You might still ask “but what does the coming together of God and humanity in Jesus Christ 2000 years ago have anything to do with me today.” I am glad you asked…

I have pointed out that we need the context of all of Jesus life in order to be able to focus on what Christmas is all about.

However, even the context of all of Jesus life is still too narrow to get the full picture of what God is doing for us.

So far, the context of all of Jesus life can be found in Luke’s Gospel.

But Luke wrote more than just this Gospel, right?

What other book in the Bible did Luke write? (Acts)

These two books are not really two but meant to be read as one unified story.

At the very beginning of Acts, what is happening?

Two events that we also remember and celebrate each and every year, just like Christmas. Ascension and Pentecost.

The meaning and significance of Christmas will become clear to us when, and only when, we focus on the nativity within the larger story of God at work in this world.

This God who came to us and became one of us in Jesus Christ, did not stay on this earth but ascended into heaven.

This God who became one with us in Jesus Christ then sent His Spirit which means that this God who came to us 2000 years ago in Jesus Christ is still present with us today.

So Christmas is all about remembering, celebrating, and pondering the mystery of how God came to us, to be with us as one of us.

Because our God is with us still today and because this God wants to live in us through the Holy Spirit, we are invited to participate in this coming together of God and humanity.

Through the Spirit within us, we are invited to participate in what God started 2000 years ago in and through Jesus.

In Jesus, God and humanity came together providing a new starting point.

Through the Spirit, we are invited to become one with God and participate in what Jesus has begun.

There is nothing cute or romantic about Jesus birth. Instead, it is all about us becoming one with God.

So on the one hand we have God who was willing to become vulnerable in Jesus,

On the other hand, there is us who have been invited to become one with God.

This raises the question: Does what we do over Christmas match or line up, is what we do compatible with what God has done for us?

We turn on flashy lights and make things shiny while God was humble entering into the darkness of this world.

In Jesus, God was hiding his full glory by becoming human so that we can see what God is like.

God entered into the ordinary human life and experience with all the pain and suffering that comes with it while we celebrate joy and happiness, wasting a ridiculous amount of money on things no one needs.

We focus on fancy and flashy things that do not make us happy, while God is being wrapped in bands of cloth and laid down to sleep in a manger.

It seems like we try to do everything we can to be different than what God did in order to become one with us.

What God has done 2000 years ago by becoming human in Jesus Christ is wonderful.

By becoming human, God made the impossible possible.

God overcame the division between God and humanity.

It is a good thing that we have Advent so that we can prepare ourselves so that what we do becomes compatible with what God did.

I think we should be concerned about the fact that what we do to remember and celebrate Christmas is primarily driven and determined by our context, families, and traditions rather then by what God did for us by becoming human in Jesus.

The question we should be asking and pondering during Advent is “Why did Jesus become human? What is the point of that?”

Well, we need to widen the scope of the story of how god is at work in this world even more.

Singeling out Jesus birth renders us unable to focus on what God has done for us by becoming human in Jesus.

Not even all of Jesus’ life gives us the full picture of how God is at work in this world.

We must include Jesus’ ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

In addition, in order to be able to appreciate the significance and meaning of Jesus’ birth, we need to look at the very beginning of God’s interaction with this world.

How would you finish this sentence: “In the beginning God…”

Do you remember? What does it say in the book of Genesis about how God created humans?

Genesis 1:27 So God created humankind[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+1%3A27&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-27a)] in his image, in the image of God he created them;

So God created humans in the image of God. I assume that we all agree that this is significant and affirms the value of each and every human being.

But what does it mean to be created in the image of God?

There are lots of ways to talk about this but most seem to be incomplete in one way or another.

In order to understand what it means for each one of us to be created in the image of God, we must answer the question “What is the image of God”

Actually, the better question is “Who is the image of God”

Anyone want to take a guess?

Talking about Jesus Paul writes in Colossians 1:15 (NRSV) “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;”

Jesus is the image of God.

In Jesus we see and come to know what it means for us to be humans created in the image of God.

Jesus shows us how God meant humans to be like!

God created all of us in the image of Jesus.

One of the key claims of the creation stories in Genesis is that in the beginning after God created everything was very good.

But we also know from Scripture, history, our own lives, and when we honestly look at ourselves that this image of God, has become dirty.

Because the image of God has become dirty and covered up with sin in all of us we are no longer in a place to be the way God created us to be.

And because the image of God in us has become dirty, Jesus needed to become human like us to again show us what the image of God is.

Only through God becoming human in Jesus can we again know what it means to be truly and fully human.

So my prayer for us as a church family is that we, during this season of Advent, would ponder what God has done for us by becoming human in Jesus Christ and then reflect on what this means for us today.