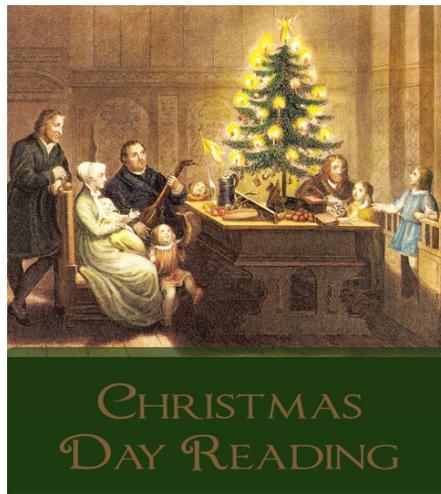


Family Sermon for Christmas Day

We're almost through with 2016, and Christmas happens to fall on a Sunday this year. We have three Christmas Eve services at 7, 9, and 11pm; the 11pm service will actually let out on Christmas day, which led us to the decision *not* to have services Christmas morning (and...because I'd like to get some rest after such a busy night). However, some people really want to go to church services on Christmas day. I figured I would give you a few blogs leading up to Christmas, so you can have your own "sermon" discussion with your family on Christmas Day (if you are so inclined).

At Element, we believe that the first pastors to families are their parents. We believe instruction about who God is should begin at home. How to follow Christ should be modeled by loving parents who teach, disciple, rebuke, and restore the children entrusted to their care. That being said, we also know that at times, it is hard to know where to begin. What I would like to give you over the course of the next three weeks is a sermon (broken up) by the church reformer, Martin Luther, in 1521.



Martin Luther was German and obviously wrote and taught his sermons in German; what I give to you is the 1906 translation, so be aware of some of the older English. Before you think to ask, yes, Martin Luther gave this sermon on Christmas day, so he was obviously much holier than we are at Element.

He starts his sermon like this:

"It is written in Haggai 2,6-7, that God says, 'I will shake the heavens; and the precious things of all nations shall come.' This is fulfilled today, for the heavens were shaken, that is, the angels in the heavens sang praises to God. And the earth was shaken, that is, the people on the earth were agitated; one journeying to this city, another to that throughout the whole land, as the Gospel tells us. It was not a violent, bloody uprising, but rather a peaceable one awakened by God who is the God of peace."

Martin Luther's life was marked by adversity as he attempted to properly live in and explain grace to others. He was put on trial for his views and there was a bloody and violent rebellion about "grace" during his lifetime. As www.religionfacts.com puts it, *"The life of Martin Luther is one of the most fascinating stories in the history of Christianity. It has all the stuff of a good novel: parental conflict, spiritual agony, life-changing moments, near-misses, princes, popes, emperors, castles, kidnapping, mobs, revolution, massacres, politics, courage, controversy, disguises, daring escapes, humor and romance. And not only is it a good story, it marks a major turning point in western history and in Christianity."*

With all of these things looming in Luther's life, it's remarkable that he starts his sermon with how God came to bring peace to His world. He speaks of how the entire world was shaken for the purpose of peace. Luther was

not against being a soldier or the concept of a “just war” ([you can read Terry Miller’s great paper on it here](#)), but he did see God’s purpose in Christ was to first bring peace--peace to our broken hearts and our broken world.

If you are doing this with your family on Christmas day, ask the following questions:

What do you think it means to have true peace?

How did Jesus’ birth herald the proclamation of that peace?

Martin Luther started by talking about how God had shaken the nation of Israel and Rome on Christmas in order to bring about peace to His people. **Luke 2:1-7 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 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.**

Luther goes on in his sermon referring to these verses:

“Observe how exact the Evangelist is in his statement that the birth of Christ occurred in the time of Caesar Augustus, and when Quirinius was governor of Syria, of which the land of Judea was a part, just as Austria is a part of the German land. This being the very first taxing, it appears that this tribute was never before paid until just at the time when Christ was to be born. By this Jesus shows that his kingdom was not to be of an earthly character nor to exercise worldly power and lordship, but that he, together with his parents, is subject to the powers that be. Since he comes at the time of the very first enrollment, he leaves no doubt with respect to this, for had he desired to leave it in doubt, he might have willed to be born under another enrollment, so that it might have been said it just happened so, without any divine intent.

Since now all the works of Jesus are precious teachings, this circumstance cannot be interpreted otherwise than that he by divine counsel and purpose will not exercise any worldly authority; but will be subject to it...behold how very ordinary and common things are to us that transpire on earth, and yet how high they are regarded in heaven. On earth it occurs in this wise: Here is a poor young woman, Mary of Nazareth, not highly esteemed, but of the humblest citizens of the village. No one is conscious of the great wonder she bears, she is silent, keeps her own counsel, and regards herself as the lowliest in the town. She starts out with her husband Joseph...Imagine how she was despised at the inns and stopping places on the way, although worthy to ride in state in a chariot of gold.

There were, no doubt, many wives and daughters of prominent men at that time, who lived in fine apartments and great splendor, while the mother of God takes a journey in mid-winter under most trying circumstances...The Evangelist shows how, when they arrived at Bethlehem, they were the most insignificant and despised, so that they had to make way for others until they were obliged to take refuge in a stable, to share with the cattle, lodging, table, bedchamber and bed, while many a wicked man sat at the head in the hotels and was honored as lord. No one noticed or was conscious of what God was doing in that stable...O what a dark night this was for Bethlehem, that was not conscious of that glorious light! See how God shows that he utterly disregards what the world is, has or desires; and furthermore, that the world shows how little it knows or notices what God is, has and does.

See, this is the first picture with which Christ puts the world to shame and exposes all it does and knows. It shows that the world's greatest wisdom is foolishness, her best actions are wrong and her greatest treasures are misfortunes.”

How often are we blind to the ordinary workings of God in our everyday lives—just like the people in Bethlehem?

How often do we overlook what God is doing because we are so consumed with our own comfort and security?

Take a moment to ask your family how they might have already overlooked Jesus today. Ask how, for this day, they can have an open heart and mind to see what Jesus wants to remind them of. Ask, “How can we live today so Jesus’ goodness and message are known because of how we see Him?”

Luther has spoken of God shaking the world to bring peace, he has spoken about how we miss Jesus in the ordinary because our lives are so consumed with self, and today, we will go over where Luther begins to speak of grace in an unconventional way.

“Grace does not interfere with nature and her work, but rather improves and promotes it. Likewise Mary, without doubt, also nourished the child with milk from her breast and not with strange milk, or in a manner different from that which nature provided, as we sing: ubere de coelo pleno, from her breast being filled by heaven, without injury or impurity. I mention this that we may be grounded in the faith and know that Jesus was a natural man in every respect just as we, the only difference being in his relation to sin and grace, he being without a sinful nature...It is a great comfort to us that Jesus took upon himself our nature and flesh. Therefore we are not to take away from him or his mother anything that is not in conflict with grace, for the text clearly says that she brought him forth, and the angels said, unto you he is born.

How could God have shown his goodness in a more sublime manner than by humbling himself to partake of flesh and blood...But what happens in heaven concerning this birth? As much as it is despised on earth, so much and a thousand times more is it honored in heaven. If an angel from heaven came and praised you and your work, would you not regard it of greater value than all the praise and honor the world could give you, and for which you would be willing to bear the greatest humility and reproach? What exalted honor is that when all the angels in heaven cannot restrain themselves from breaking out in rejoicing, so that even poor shepherds in the fields hear them preach, praise God, sing and pour out their joy without measure? Were not all joy and honor realized at Bethlehem, yes, all joy and honor experienced by all the kings and nobles on earth, to be regarded as only dross and abomination, of which no one likes to think, when compared with the joy and glory here displayed?

Behold how very richly God honors those who are despised of men, and that very gladly. Here you see that his eyes look into the depths of humility, as is written, "He sitteth above the cherubim" and looketh into the depths. Nor could the angels find princes or valiant men to whom to communicate the good news; but only unlearned laymen, the most humble people upon earth. Could they not have addressed the high priests, who it was supposed knew so much concerning God and the angels? No, God chose poor shepherds, who, though they were of low esteem in the sight of men, were in heaven regarded as worthy of such great grace and honor.

See how utterly God overthrows that which is lofty! And yet we rage and rant for nothing but this empty honor, as we had no honor to seek in heaven; we continually step out of God's sight, so that he may not see us in the depths, into which he alone looks...He works in opposition to these temporal things, looks with favor upon that from which the world turns, teaches that from which it flees and takes up that which it discards.

And although we are not willing to tolerate such acts of God and do not want to receive blessing, honor and life in this way, yet it must remain so. God does not change his purpose, nor does he teach or act

differently than he purposed. We must adapt ourselves to him, he will not adapt himself to us. Moreover, he who will not regard his word, nor the manner in which he works to bring comfort to men, has assuredly no good evidence of being saved. In what more lovely manner could he have shown his grace to the humble and despised of earth, than through this birth in poverty, over which the angels rejoice, and make it known to no one but to the poor shepherds?"

On Christmas Eve we talked about light, that Jesus came into the world to expose our darkness. One of the ways we live in darkness is by constantly thinking the rich, famous, or powerful have everything we could ever want or need. (I wonder if they got everything wanted today in terms of "stuff.") We raise people higher in our own estimation and want what they have, but God comes in the form of Jesus and shows what really matters; it is not the high and lofty, it is the common and ordinary. We are a people who live in the common and ordinary places and *that* is where Jesus chose to make Himself known.

This Christmas day, ask your kids what would bring them the most joy: having God speak words of grace over them, or having their favorite movie star (or super hero) show up for dinner? Talk about how God's grace reminds us that living in the ordinary is good, and that as we live for Him in ordinary places, His grace becomes more deeply known and understood.

Merry Christmas, Element.