

## *Christmas Eve Sermon 1 by Bishop Michael Hawkins*

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

Bishop of Saskatchewan

Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. +

A young girl was terribly frightened one night, as she went to bed. She kept calling her mother back to her bedside with inconsolable tears. Her mother had tried promises, threats, ignoring the child, and finally she resorted to theology. “You know God is always with you everywhere, and his angels keep watch over you,” she offered. Still, somehow, that assurance was not enough for this little girl. She responded, “I know, Mommy, but I need somebody here with skin on.”

“I need somebody here with skin on.” God, the Creator of the Universe, put skin on, our flesh and blood, assumed our full human nature and lived among us. God did not just dress up like one of us for a day, he became human and lived and suffered and died as one of us, for all of us. He comes to save us, from darkness and sin and death.

## *Christmas Eve Sermon 1 by Bishop Michael Hawkins*

We wonder: Does God exist? Does God care? How can we know? The proof is that he came in this one human, Jesus born of Mary. He had sent others, but now he comes himself. This is our God and Saviour; we have waited and longed for him.

You know, I love our Manger scenes at home and in Church, and our Christmas Hymns and Carols, but in their soft familiarity, they may allow us to forget the harsh details of the birth of Jesus. In the idealized version, Mary smiles, and her hair is unruffled. She looks fresh as a daisy, unlike any newly delivered mother. Jesus is silent and still, clean and pink and happy, unlike most newborns. But let's think harder about how things must have really been.

Joseph could not leave Mary behind. We may want to accuse him for making a young, first-time, nine-months-pregnant mother travel such a distance. It's no wonder she had the baby, after that kind of trip. Donkeys don't carry evenly; they sort of swing their hips as you ride. It would be a lot more of a roller coaster ride than a trip on a bus. But Joseph would not leave Mary alone. She would have to face the shame and difficulties by herself, so he took her with him. He was as he

## ***Christmas Eve Sermon 1 by Bishop Michael Hawkins***

---

has been called for centuries: her Protector. Mary must have been scared. We can forget all this, the difficulties and obstacles, but Luke brings them into play. We have a story of a young girl, surprised by her pregnancy, which would bring shame and dishonour. A puzzled man, engaged to be married to her. Mary and Joseph believed, but she must have been afraid, and he must have had his doubts. But they press on. Luke's detail about the census for taxing explains why a couple living in Nazareth have their child in a Bethlehem barn. But it also shows more of the difficulties, for the taxes and the census were part of the Roman occupation of Judah. The Jews were not free in their own country and land. Mary and Joseph belonged to an oppressed people.

Bethlehem was an overcrowded city full of rotting garbage. There were people and noise and jostling everywhere. And let's be honest - barns stink. The barn may have been warm, but it would have smelled of manure, animal hair and rotting straw. The barn of the busy innkeeper is not spotless. It is smoky from torches. Mary is tired and dirty from a long trip, and despite the angel's assurance, she is afraid. She is still amazed that she is

## ***Christmas Eve Sermon 1 by Bishop Michael Hawkins***

---

having a baby at all. She has no midwife, and it is hard to imagine that Joseph attended prenatal classes and practiced as her labour coach. So this young mother must give birth in a barn, with only the help of an old, inexperienced man.

It is our human inclination to soften the dirt and suffering and fear, but we must recognize that God was born into poverty, dirt, homelessness and fear, into a very real world - our world. God was born a wrinkled, bloody baby to a scared, young girl in a barn.

The world of our imagined manger scene needs no redemption. It is perfect already. But God was born into the world we know, with all its wonders, and with hatred, fear, dirt and pain. God so loved the world, and God so loves you and me, as we are.

But that harsh manger scene is transformed into something warm and sweet by the presence of Jesus himself. We see a stinky barn as something warm and mysterious and wonderful, because we see it in the light of Jesus Christ. If we can see the loveliness in that scene, it is by the same light of Jesus that we

## ***Christmas Eve Sermon 1 by Bishop Michael Hawkins***

---

can see what God so loves in ourselves and in one another.

We began thinking about that girl, scared of the dark, at night in her bed. In the story of Christmas, there are some older boys scared at night. The shepherds were sore afraid - we might say scared to death. But the angel told them that they didn't have to fear anymore, because the Saviour was born. One of the reasons why we gather for Church tonight, and why it means so much to us, is that we say here, because of Jesus, because God has come in our flesh and blood, we are not afraid of the dark. His light and love and life are with us now and always. Darkness is never really dark anymore.

To little girls scared in bed, and to big boys afraid out in the field, the news of this night is: "Don't be afraid, there is Good News, God loves you, he has come to give you light and life, he has come with skin on, in Jesus." So then, let's give glory to God, share peace on earth and good will with one another. +