

December 24, 2017
Christmas Eve
Matthew 1:18-25

Why is it we tend to use St. Luke's Gospel account of Jesus' nativity instead of St. Matthew's in our Christmas plays, Christmas cards and Charlie Brown Christmas specials? Because let's face it, in comparison, Matthew's account is boring. No census. No grand announcement by the angel Gabriel. No poor Mary and Joseph traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem. No mean innkeeper telling them there's no room in the inn. No stable and manger. No heavenly host scaring the stuffing out of the shepherds. It's just Mary being pregnant by the Holy Spirit, Joseph contemplating divorce, the angel—in a dream, not live—saying “Don't do that,” the Immanuel quote from Isaiah, then the child is born and named Jesus. That's it.

We don't like that. We like the drama. We like the action. We like things to be big and glitzy. More and more we've got the attention span of a Jack-Russel Terrier and we like quick flash and distraction. And this isn't healthy when it comes to Christmas or life in general.

Just look around your life over the past week or so. Cards, parties, shopping, wrapping, cooking, visiting, planning, and more! In the community there's lights, sales, festivals, parades, fundraisers. Now Christmas is here! Family, presents, feasting, football, fighting (depending on what your family is like) and who knows what else. All this on top of the hectic grind that is work, school, leagues and clubs and whatever else you have going on.

This arrival of Christ for you is described by St. John as “*The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world*” and that “*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*”

But you know what we have all around us in life and especially at Christmas? Other lights! We've got all sorts of other activities and priorities screaming for attention and tempting

us to treat them as more important than the truth, salvation and yes rulership of Jesus Christ our Lord. You see the darkness, sin and death that is this fallen and broken life most often doesn't look like darkness to us. I kind of wish it did. If we saw it that way Jesus would always be beaming like a lighthouse on the coast, keeping us from danger, a guiding star bringing us safely home.

But let's face it. Life is more like being on the promenade deck of a Carnival cruise ship when the party is going full blast. There's drama, action, flash and glitz, both joys and tragedies, stuff both wholesome and sinful, all of it being blare and glare, attempting to drown out and dim the shining of Jesus in our lives.

But that's just how it is, and has always been. How flashy and awesome was that baby in a manger? Not much. Nothing special. No embroidered blanket, fancy crib or princely dwelling. No, wrapped in cloths and laid in a manger, the only fanfare off in the hills, not for kings and priests, but lowly shepherds.

Thirty years later the same. His victorious battle to save mankind not with a massive army in gleaming armor with streaming banners and sounding trumpets. No, the death of a criminal on a cross, and then a wonderful resurrection denied and dismissed by the wise and powerful.

Today the same. Jesus arrives, but He's not flashy. Some water and words at the font. Some bread and some wine from the altar. Some words in a book or proclaimed from a pulpit. Jesus is not flashy here. But He was, is and always will be forgiveness of sin, peace with God, life everlasting. He is "Immanuel," God with us. Nothing else of the world, no matter how loud or bright it seems to be, is God with you, forgiving you, and keeping you safe from death. Only Jesus, in the non-flashy ways He is here today.

So today in this season, and tomorrow in the rest of your life, stop allowing anything to outshine Christ. He is God's greatest gift to you, because He is God Himself for you. He loves you. He saves you. He wants you with Him both in this life as we struggle to keep focused amid the glare of things temporal, and in the life to come where nothing outshines Him as we dwell joyfully in His presence forever.

Keep the Christ in Christmas, and keep looking to the light of Christ in life and for life.
Merry Christmas. Amen.