

Sunday, December 22, 2024 Nativity Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

「The Sign of the Manger」 Pastor Takaaki Inoue

Isaiah 11:1~5, Luke 2:8~20

① 【Coming down is a characteristic of Christianity.] God has adapted to man.】

Happy Christmas. The other day, when I walked in Umeda for the first time in a long time, the Christmas lights were shining and it was very beautiful. Even if the people of the world don't know anything about the Bible, they feel that Christmas is about light and darkness. On the night Jesus was born, shepherds camped out on the outskirts of Bethlehem and watched over their flocks all night. Suddenly, a radiant angel appeared and approached the shepherds. They were illuminated by the light, and the earth, which had been pitch black, became bright. The Bible says: "The angel of the Lord drew near, and the glory of the Lord shone all around, and they were very afraid" (Luke 2:9~11) The coming of light from heaven, this is the hallmark of Christmas. The angel said. "Do not be afraid, for I tell you of the great joy that will be given to the whole people. A Savior has been born for you in the city of David today. He is the Lord Messiah. You will find the suckling child wrapped in a cloth and lying in a manger. This is my sign unto you.' In the Old Testament, it was said, "He who sees God will die" (Exodus 33:20). That is why the shepherds were afraid. But they did not die. On the contrary, the birth of the Savior was announced to the shepherds, who had been living a life that had nothing to do with religion. The angel said, "The Savior has been born for you." It means that you are also remembered by God. It means that even those who think that I cannot be saved are invited by God. It teaches that God's grace and His light can reach even the lowest places, even to those who are in the darkest. Then a great army of angels appeared and sang a great chorus of praise for God's great deeds on the earth, saying, "Glory be to God in the Most High, and peace on earth, and to those who are in good will" (Luke 2:14).

This is where the characteristics of Christianity are well expressed. The religions of this world require people to work hard and climb to heaven. Cults even impose conditions such as how much you should donate and how many people you can bring. It is the movement of man from the bottom up. There is always fear. This is because I am always worried about whether I meet the requirements. Christianity, however, is the opposite, approaching sinners from God. Light will come into the darkness, heaven will descend on earth (into hell), and heaven and earth will become one. In other words, it is the movement of God from top to bottom. All of the Christmas stories we read today are stories from top to bottom. People are not doing anything. God becomes a man, angels speak of salvation to the poor shepherds, and praise is poured out from heaven

to earth. The fact that it comes down is a characteristic of Christianity. I think this is very important. The shepherds said, "Let us see the event" (v.15), and Mary "took all these events into her heart" (v.19). Christmas is an event that God has done. Christmas is about what God has done.

● In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul said, "Knowledge exalts a man, but love builds up" (1 Corinthians 8:1). You can tell if a person has grown as a person by looking at whether or not they can adapt to the other person. It means being able to go down to the other person, talking from the same point of view as the other person, speaking in a language that the other person understands, and being able to walk as the other person grows. How humble Jesus was. He knew everything, but he spoke only in parables, and though He was brighter than the sun, He did not emit a dazzling light, and He became poor, small, and weak, so that people might feel at ease. He aligned himself with the weakest. This is called love. Love is the ability to adapt oneself to the other person. The greatness of God is not so much that He created the universe, but that He became a weak person by adapting Himself to a small and weak human being, and He became a lowly person who stooped down, sympathized with the suffering and sorrow of others, and wept.

② [Why was the nativity known to the poor shepherds?]

But why was the birth of the Savior known to the shepherds, not to the priests who served God in the temple, and not to the religious who were eagerly seeking the Messiah? The priests will say, "Why did I tell you? I don't believe what you're saying." Why was he a shepherd? After this, the shepherds said, "Come, let us go to Bethlehem and see the events which the Lord has made known." (verse 15), and he hurried to find the suckling child lying in the manger. When I say "found," I mean that I didn't find it right away, but I walked around some of the stables. "When the shepherds saw the scene, they made known to the people what the angel had told them about this child, and all who heard it wondered at the story of the shepherds." (verses 17~18). The shepherds immediately told the people the story of the angel, but those who heard it, wondering, did not go out to see the event. Why don't you go? The angel said that the "suckling child lying in the manger" was "a sign to you." "Sign" is "sign" in English. It's not a wonder or a miracle. The signs that the angel told us were too far from the image of the people, too mundane. But the shepherds did not believe in the image of salvation, but in the Word of God. How honest and humble they are! I think there is a reason why the shepherds were informed of this.

③ [The secret of praise is to know that God loves you]

"The shepherds went home glorifying and praising God, because everything they had seen and heard was as the angel had told them" (Luke 2:20). It's just

a poor and hard daily labor. But they went back to real life in praise. Why was it possible to praise? It is because we have come to understand God's love that we are loved by God, and that God is with us.

●I found an article in a book. On September 17, 1987, Pope John Paul II was visiting AIDS patients at the Dolores Mission Church in San Francisco. The Pope told the AIDS patients, "God loves you indiscriminately, indefinitely, and unconditionally," and shook hands with each of them. Suddenly, the little blue-eyed Brandin Au Roque shook off his father's arms, which were held in his arms, and jumped into the Pope's bosom. A five-year-old child who contracted AIDS through a blood transfusion began to suffer every day. When the Pope kissed the wound on the child's swollen face without hesitation, the American conscience would have read in it more than the "heart of the Pope." As I read this, I thought that Jesus had kissed the wound of my sin in the same way. I couldn't stop crying when I thought that he would be just like me and that he would be condemned by others. There is nothing more gratifying than knowing the love of Christ.

We believe that when the Messiah comes, he will exterminate the wicked and bring peace to the world. We seek miracles, wonders, miracles. But what the Bible teaches us is that Christ did not come to change the world, but to change you. No matter how dark the world is, no matter how much things change around you, you just need to be at peace.

●I read a letter from a priest named Gogol that I received from Mr. U. "There is no moment of peace in this life, and we must always keep this in mind. Today, tomorrow, anxiety happens one after another. We were called to fight, not to celebrate and enjoy the world. It is in the hereafter that we celebrate and enjoy."

The world is like the waves of the ocean, constantly changing, upsetting and never stable. We seek certain peace in this world, but we cannot obtain it because it is not in this world. The only thing that is certain is God's love. "We have a glorious victory through Him who loves us" (Romans 8:37). When we die, nothing remains, but there is only one thing left. It is "God's love." What God has done for you will remain forever. Nothing is certain in us or in this world, it just comes from above. A person who understands this is a happy person. Christ was born in you today to lift you up to heaven, the earth. Christ will lie in you to make you incorruptible today. The manger is a symbol of yourself tainted by sin. But Christ is willing to come to you, the vessel of sin. So don't be afraid. God came today to be your best friend, to bear your sins, to be eaten by you, and to keep you alive forever.