

GOD'S PRAYER FOR US AT CHRISTMAS
Christmas Eve December 24, 2016 –John 16: 20-24
The Church of the Covenant

I say when Jesus was born in Bethlehem God prayed a perfect prayer for us. He opened up the deepest part of His heart and what emerged was His Word to us, the Word made flesh in Jesus, a prayer spontaneously flowing from the heart and soul of God. So what was God praying? What is God praying for you and me at Christmas?

I have often read that when people are surveyed about their greatest fears, their greatest fear is speaking in public. That's number one on the list. Number two on the list is dying. So basically people would rather die than speak in public. And a subset of that fear is that people would probably rather speak anywhere rather than in church and do and say anything other than pray publicly. So we would rather die a thousand deaths than pray publicly. But as a pastor, of course, you pretty much have to pray publicly. You probably think when we go to seminary we are perfectly formed as pastors already. Not so. What I discovered was that each class in seminary began with prayer and often the professor would call on a student to open the class in prayer. I would rather die than pray publicly. Perhaps I can go back to law school. So I ever so carefully wrote out a very carefully written prayer and tucked it into my notebook. And when class was about to start I would feel around until I found my carefully written prayer. But after a while, you know, you relax and get more casual. And then it happened. Betty Edwards, one of my favorite professors and my Greek professor, called on me to pray. I grabbed for my prayer in my notebook. And guess what? I couldn't find it. God has an infinitely wonderful sense of humor. So the beads of sweat are forming on my brow. I have no prayer to read and no time. So I just bow my head, and open my heart, and open my mouth and what flows out is what flows out. It is pure. It is unscripted. It is genuine and authentic. No "thees and thous". Just the first fruit of my heart. I learned about prayer in Greek Class in seminary. It doesn't have to be perfect; its just from the heart...

God opened up His heart that first Christmas. And what poured out was a Word. What poured out was a prayer. What poured out was a Baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. When we look at the manger we see and hear there the way God really feels about us...That's dumb, you say. God doesn't have to pray to God. God knows everything already so why would He pray about us.

I mean, Jesus prays for us. Recorded in the 17th chapter of John is Jesus' high priestly prayer, "*I in them and thou in me, that they may be one...*" (John 17: 23) prays Jesus. Jesus is our mediator; Jesus is still our intercessor; Jesus is still praying for us in heaven. I like the thought of the Son of God praying to God the Father on my behalf. When Jesus opens His heart for me before the throne of grace I know His Father listens. I like in the book of Romans where it speaks of the Holy Spirit praying for us. The Spirit "*intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words*" (Romans 8: 26) Don't you sometimes get to the place where you can't even pray about something anymore. It is too painful. Or you are just "prayed out". You've prayed to God over and over and over again. You have no more words to pray. You got nothin'. I like the idea that when we get there and we have nothing to say that the Holy Spirit is praying for us with deep groanings from the human heart, winging their way up to God's mercy seat, speaking a Word in the presence of God on our behalf. The Spirit takes those groanings and turns them into prayers and places them before the mercy of God. So see, God does pray to God. Jesus prays to God on our behalf. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us on our behalf. And God prays for us, as well. God speaks a Word. It is a creative Word. As the Gospel of John notes: "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth* (John 1: 14) So what was the Word God spoke in the manger? What was the personal

Word He spoke to you personally in Bethlehem that night? And what is the personal Word God speaks to you *this* night? Listen carefully now, and you will hear God speak a Word in a prayer for us tonight... Look at the manger. Look at the little baby lying there. Look at the quiet of the night. See the stars. Hear the angels. What is God's prayer for you this Christmas??????

"I'm not angry with you. I love you. I'm not a faraway God. I am God with you. I am God for you, not God against you. I am Emanuel. I am not here to judge you. I am here for you to caress me, and enfold me in your arms, and know and touch and see the great love I have born into the world just for you. I pray tonight that whatever you have told yourself about me that has been a barrier to you experiencing me and my love that you would let it go, that you would embrace me tonight.

I'm not a scary God. I am not here as a God of judgment, power and wrath. The Word I speak to you tonight is in the form of a little powerless infant. Jesus is born to love you and for you to love Him. He quietly and gently insinuates Himself into your heart. He does not come to storm the gates of your life in power. He comes to be invited in. I pray tonight that whatever has kept you from embracing me would be discarded and that this little baby Jesus would be born in you tonight.

I'm not here to take life away from you. When you look at this little child you understand my heart to bring you life and life abundantly. I am here for you to start again with a new birth. I am here for you to let the past be in the past, to make all things new. I am here to release you from your burdens, to free you from everything that binds you, to make you free indeed. In that day when you die, I am here to give you life eternal. In that day when your loved one dies, I am here to comfort you and give you life out of that dead part of your heart. There is no death in the manger, only life and new life and eternal life born here. That's the Word I speak tonight. I pray that you might receive that new life tonight.

Just like that day when you first picked up your new born child, that is what I pray tonight will be for you. My child, there is trauma and pain in birth, just as there is trauma and pain in life. The birth pangs are real and painful. But they produce a new child, the object of your love and joy. A woman *"no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child has been born into the world"*. (John 16: 21) Remember that moment when you first held your newborn infant, remember the love and the joy that poured forth from your heart. Think about the love and joy that pours forth from my heart to you this night. **Think of my joy in the birth of my only begotten Son.** My prayer for you tonight is that nothing in this life, nothing that has ever been, nothing that shall ever be, nothing that life can hurl at you to harm you or hurt you, that nothing could ever take even one iota of the joy I am sending into the world to you this night, nothing and *"no one can take your joy from you."* (John 16: 22) I am praying for you that whatever you face in life tonight, that it could never hope to take away the joy I am sending into the world just for you, born in a manger, born in Bethlehem, tonight.

Shake your fist at heaven and I still love you. In anger seek to run away from me and I still care. Nurture the hurt in your heart and I will still heal it. Seek me where you will never find me and I will still wait for you in a manger in Bethlehem. Come to me this night. Embrace me and you will hear the prayer that flows from my heart for you tonight. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God spoke a Word. It is God's prayer for us at Christmas. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*