Christmas Eve Family Service

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Preacher: Rev. Chris Ley

[0:00] It's really nice to see you guys. My name's Chris. I'm one of the people who works here at St. John's and especially if you're a visitor tonight, we are so, so thrilled to have you. I just want to talk for a few minutes about Christmas and I'm going to start with a question. Who here has ever met a famous person?

Who's met a famous person? Not very many of us. Okay. Interesting. Who does anyone want to tell me who they met? Yeah. Who did you? Thomas Muller. All right. Okay, great. He plays for the Vancouver Whitecaps. He's pretty famous. Yeah. Who have you met?
J.I. Packer. He used to go to our church. Yeah. Who have you met? Elvis Costello. Okay. And I see one more hand. Who have you met? Who? Thomas. All right. I don't know Thomas. You must be very famous. Aaron, who have you met?
M.C. Hammer. M.C. Hammer. That's a high bar. Yeah. Who have you met? Michael Jordan. Michael Jordan. Wow. That's right in line with M.C. Hammer. That's astounding.
My sister is here and she met the Queen and she gave her a bouquet of daffodils. Yes. And you've met her as well? Okay. Well, you guys can duke it out in the parking lot. That's fantastic.
[1:24] You know, I want to tell you guys about someone famous I met. Okay. So brace yourselves. This is all very impressive. But now it's my turn. You ready? Brent Sopel. Brent Sopel.

Brent Sopel. Who here has heard of Brent Sopel? I see seven hands. Thank you. Brent Sopel, as seven of you know, played for the Vancouver Canucks in 1998 to 2006.
He was our sixth best defenseman. What you need to know about me as a kid is I loved the Vancouver Canucks. The Canucks were everything when I was a kid.
And I was going Christmas shopping with my mom at Oak Ridge Mall, just two blocks from here. And it was super busy and crowded. And I was really afraid of losing my mom because she walks really fast when she's Christmas shopping, as every mom does.
And then I saw right in front of us Brent Sopel. All six foot two, 205 pound, just this beast of a man. Brent Sopel had long hair and a thick mustache way before mustaches were cool.
[2:31] And I just saw him and was spellbound. I just froze like the shepherds on Christmas night. My mom did not notice Brent Sopel. My mom didn't know who Brent Sopel was, like all of you.

And so what my mom did is she cut off Brent Sopel as she was walking. She nearly hip-checked him. I was horrified. And Brent Sopel had to stop.
And I thought he might stick out his hip and throw my mom through the glass of the nearest shop. I was afraid that Brent Sopel might snap my mom in half because she cut him off.
A point of my silly story is I saw a celebrity, someone who mattered a lot to me, and I froze. I was in the presence of greatness. But my mom was there, too.
She saw someone I thought was pretty famous, and she didn't react at all. She didn't know who he was. She didn't care. She walked right past. She nearly hip-checked him.
[3:34] We just heard an amazing story about the most famous person you could ever imagine. God himself coming to earth as a tiny little baby.

And what we heard in the story is there were a whole bunch of people, and they all responded differently. And so I want to look at the four ways people responded to Jesus, the four characters in the story.
But I need your help to do it. Okay? So here's what we're going to do. I have hidden some objects around me. You can see them from where you're seated, so you don't need to stand up and run around.
It's okay. But each object represents one of the people in the story and how they responded to Jesus being born, to God coming. So the first person we meet in our story is Caesar Augustus.

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Do you remember him? He was standing over here, and he had a crown on and a big cape. Caesar is represented by a crown with a Roman helmet underneath it.
[4:39] And I wonder, if you look around, does anyone see a crown? This one's the hardest, I'll be honest. No, it's not. It's on this side of the room.

Does anybody see a crown? Can you point at it if you see it? Where is it? Over here? Okay. So on this Christmas tree, I can't make it, but on the top of that tree, do you see there's a crown up there? That crown represents Caesar Augustus. He was the most powerful person in the world. He had the biggest army. Do you remember how Caesar responded to Jesus being born in the story?
Caesar was like my mom seeing Brent Sopel. He didn't even notice. He didn't even care. He didn't jump in the air. He didn't do a thing. He made laws.
He ordered people around. He made Jesus' parents go all the way across the country when she was ready to have her baby. Some people here don't know that God has come to earth.
[5:40] They've never heard the story. They're like Caesar. So that's the first way we can respond is we don't know. So we don't have any response. Okay.

The second person in the play was actually played by me. Do you remember? I was wearing a tea towel and a duvet cover. Do you remember that? I was an innkeeper. And so the symbol I have that represents an innkeeper is a big sign that says no room.
Okay. You guys are getting the hang of this. So behind the organ. There it is. I'm just going to show it for the people who can't see it. There's a big no room sign. This is how some people respond to Jesus being born.
They hear this most amazing thing has happened. God has come to earth. And do you know how they respond? I'm too busy. I have no room in my life for God.
I'm full already. Go away. Go somewhere else. I'll be honest with you. A lot of people this week feel I have no room this week for Jesus.
[6:42] I'm too busy with everything else going on. And that's how a lot of people respond to the story. They hear the story. They like the songs. But at the end of the day, they feel my life's too full.

I have no room for Jesus in my life. And so they send him away. Okay. Number three. We're on a roll now. Number three. Does anyone remember? Who did the angels visit in the story?
Shepherds. Well, an angel did visit Mary. That was very good. We didn't see that in our story. But bonus points. In our story, Mary visited the shepherds. And the shepherds are represented by their big shepherd's crook.
Does anyone see a shepherd's crook? Oh, very good. I was quite proud of this one. Harder to hide a shepherd's crook up here than you might imagine. There it is. It was leaning against the organ.
Now, do you know what's interesting about shepherds? This was mentioned in our play. Are shepherds really popular people? Do you remember? Were they the cool dudes at the playground?
[7:42] They weren't, actually. They lived outside town. They lived with animals, which meant they were probably a bit stinky. They were certainly dirty. Do you know they weren't allowed into religious services?

So if a shepherd showed up in a building like this one back then, they would have been like, Nope, you're not allowed here. You're too dirty. And yet that is who God sent his angels to announce and to say, Come.
You're welcome. Come and see what's happened. And how did the shepherds respond? Do you remember when the angel came and said, Don't be afraid. Jesus is born. Do you remember what they did?
They were scared. What were they after they were scared? What did they do? Did they go see Jesus? Or did they run away and scream? They went and saw Jesus.
This is from the story. They said, Let us go to Bethlehem and let's see this thing that's happened. And we're told they went to see Jesus in the manger and they were amazed.
[8:41] And then listen to what they did. They shared the news with the whole town. The shepherds told everybody. They didn't care that people didn't like them or that they were stinky or smelly. They went and told the whole world what had happened.

Maybe we know the story because of what the shepherds told people that day. And we're told they went back to work and they glorified God and they praised him for all they'd seen and had been told.

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Okay, there is one more final response. One final person. And it's the person who had the best seat. Better than anyone else. Jesus' mom, Mary.
The teenage girl who carried and birthed God's son. Does anyone remember how Mary responded to Jesus being born? Verse 19 says, Mary treasured all these things in her heart.
Does anyone see a heart? Ah, look at that. How did that get there? Maria is carrying a heart. And you know what's interesting?
[9:42] All the people in our story represent all the different responses to Jesus. We had people who were too busy for Jesus at the beginning. We had, do you remember BC Hydro came to the door?

That's like Caesar. He didn't even know it was Christmas. We had people who treasured Jesus in their heart like Maria and Betsy and Uncle Jimmy. We had people like the shepherds. Mr. Bell? Yes, Mr. Bell. We had all the characters represented in the story. So, now we need to answer a question. We've been told this amazing news just like the shepherds were.
And so all of us need to ask ourselves, how will I respond? God has come to be with us. A Savior has come who is the King and the Lord.
How will we respond to Him? Will we pretend He doesn't exist like Caesar? Will we say, no room, go away, my life's too full?
[10:41] Oh, I like this. Will we be like the shepherds who are curious and go and check Jesus out and see what's happened? That would be very good. And how about maybe Mary who treasured all these things in her heart?

Wonderful. Okay, so as you head into Christmas, you guys, don't forget it's about Jesus and it's about this greatest gift. And how we respond to Him really does matter.
Okay? I'm going to pray for us. Let's pray. Hands together, eyes closed. Lord Jesus, I thank you that you came to earth. And I thank you that you are our Savior.
And you are the Christ. And you are the Lord. And I pray we would not be like the people of Bethlehem who sent Him away. We would not be like Caesar who didn't even know He came.
But we would be like the shepherds and Mary and Joseph who saw Him and worshipped Him and shared this story about Him. I pray this in Jesus' name.
[11:39] Amen. Amen. Amen.

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