

Luke 2:16 “A God for the Everyday”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Kids, I'd like to invite you to come on the steps again. We've been meeting together and talking about things that get you excited about Christmas. Have you all had a good Christmas? Who's had a good Christmas? You enjoyed celebrating? Yeah? All right. Does anybody know what this is? A manger. A manger, yeah. Of all of the Christmas decorations. It's a farm. Yeah, it looks like a farm, doesn't it? Yeah. You know, kids love Christmas decorations, don't they? But I think my favorite Christmas decoration has always been manger scenes. Adults sometimes call them nativity sets. I've heard that some of y'all call them away in the mangers. And I think that's a really good name for them. And that is very sweet.

[1 : 00] And so... I would call it a farm of God. A farm of God. That's a great way to say it. Because you know what? If you had one of these, there's one thing that you probably wouldn't expect to find in a stable in a farm, isn't it?

A farm of a manger. Yeah. I mean, there's some things that are usually there. Like, you think a cow might be in the stable? Yeah. Yeah. Should we put him in there? You think there might be other animals on that first Christmas?

Was there a donkey around? Yeah. Yeah. Mary and Joseph had to ride on something, right? So there they'd come on a donkey and then... Don't forget baby Jesus. Well, we won't forget him, but we're not there yet.

We got to get the shepherd and the sheep there, right? They were all used to being in mangers. But what would you almost never find in a stable like this?

Baby Jesus. Baby. Nothing. Yeah. And the baby shows up at Christmas right in the middle of all these people who are usually here is the baby Jesus.

[2 : 07] But not just any baby. Baby Jesus. You're right. It's not just any baby. Because babies usually don't come here. But baby Jesus reminds us that God shows up sometimes in places where we would not expect him to be.

And we sometimes forget that he would be there. You know that? Jesus is with you when? Just on Christmas Day? When? All the time and every day.

Some of you probably like to draw pictures. Maybe some of you will draw a picture while Pastor Will is preaching this morning, won't you? Will you draw pictures? And you might draw a picture of your family. You might draw your parents and your siblings.

And don't forget to draw God because he's there with your family. When you draw a picture of your school. You might put classmates. You might draw your teacher.

And you know who else is there at your school? God! God is there with you at your school all the time. He's everywhere. He is everywhere. He is everywhere. He is everywhere at every time and every day.

[3 : 13] You're right. And I want you all to remember that because that's how much he loves you. That he's always with you in everything that you do. You may even want when you clean up your Christmas decorations and you get ready to put your nativity set away.

If your parents let you, you might even leave baby Jesus out in your living room this year to remember that he doesn't leave you, does he? He doesn't go away when Christmas is over. He's with you everywhere you go. And that's what I want you all to remember this Christmas, okay? Jesus came to be in a place you might not have thought he would be because he is with you everywhere.

Can I pray for us? Jesus, thank you so much that you came to be with us. Thank you that you love these kids especially so much that you were born as a baby to be with them, never to leave them. And I pray that this year that they would know that you're with them when they go to school and when they play on the playground and when they're running around their house. That they would know that you're with them and that you love them and that they would follow you every moment of every day.

[4 : 19] And we pray in Jesus' name, amen. Thank you all so much for helping me out. You can go back to where we were sitting or if you go to kids' worship, you see Miss Beth back there by the door, you can go right back there to Miss Beth and go to kids' worship.

Thank you all for coming up here. It's been a lot of fun to talk with them. And to pray for God's work in their lives and for us to see the joy of Christmas in some of these same places that our kids do. I'm going to read you something as we get started. Those who believe in God can never in a way be sure of Him again.

Once they have seen Him in a stable, they can never be sure where He will appear or to what lengths He will go or to what ludicrous depths of self-humiliation He will descend in His wild pursuit of man.

If holiness and the awful power and majesty of God were present in this least auspicious of all events, this birth of a peasant's child, then there is no place where we can hide from God.

[5 : 27] No place where we are safe from His power to break in and to recreate the human heart. Because it is just where He seems most helpless that He is most strong.

And just where we least expect Him that He comes most fully. Theologian Frederick Buechner wrote that profound reflection in his book, *The Hungering Dark*.

God, in His wild pursuit of us and of coming to recreate our hearts, shows up just where we least expect Him.

Like in the manger. A very everyday place for many things to be. But perhaps, we think, not for God.

I mean, the kids knew that, right? Not for the baby Jesus. Until God Himself humbles Himself and shows up in of all places right there.

[6 : 41] My heart for us this morning, as we move through the end of the Christmas season into a new year, is to wonder for a few minutes, to marvel at this shocking reality of Christmas.

This incredible display of divine love. And that we would just stand back and marvel together. And then, that in light of it, we might rewire our expectations for where God might show up.

Right in our everyday lives. Before we leave our Christmas celebrations behind, might the wonder of Christmas and the Christ of Christmas actually come into this next year with us?

I certainly hope so. We'll start this morning with the Christmas story in Luke chapter 2, in which the manger is not incidental.

Yeah, so I'll admit Jesus wasn't born in the barn behind the local hotel with no vacancy. Maybe like we sometimes pictured. But the manger part, Luke makes very clear.

[8 : 00] Verse 16. They, the shepherds, went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger.

Now, shepherds would have been very familiar with mangers, but they wouldn't have often seen babies there.

But it's highlighted. It sticks out in part because that's where the shepherds were sent to look. See, manger is in Luke 2 three times.

Just in a few verses. Verse 7. Mary places her newborn son in the manger. And then verse 12. The sign for the shepherds will be the baby in a manger.

That they go, in verse 16, and find just as promised. Well, what's it a sign of?

[9 : 00] The baby in a manger is the sign of what? That a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord, will be a baby in a manger.

That He has arrived on earth. That He's in Bethlehem. This will be a sign to you. What does God make? A sign of Himself so that we won't miss His arrival.

So that it won't be missed. Everyone will notice that He's come. Will it be a mighty king on a war horse clothed in robes? No.

A tiny baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. What an unusual and humble place for a Messiah to be.

Now, these shepherds likely weren't experts on Messiahs. But they knew enough to know that the promised Messiah would be an anointed one.

[10:08] A king. He was going to be their deliverer. He was going to reign in power. So undoubtedly, they envisioned someone who would stand out, right?

Probably physically imposing, socially influential, powerfully arrayed. He would look the part. And yet they're told what they should look for is a baby in a manger.

To look in a place they were quite familiar with, part of their everyday world, but usually full of animal food. Not babies.

We should probably be getting the idea already at this point in the story that this Messiah is going to upset a lot of expectations. He'll have a kingdom, sure enough, but not of this world.

He'll have power, sure enough, but he'll use it to help others, not to elevate himself. He'll go to Jerusalem, sure enough, the place for any with religious or political aspirations.

[11:18] But he'll go there to suffer and die. Part of Christ's humiliation is that he was born.

And that in a low condition. Living in this world of pain and brokenness under the law. See, he's showing us that the Messiah has indeed come to seek and to save, but not necessarily the most impressive draft picks.

The most spiritual lot. The top performing pillars of the community. Now he's come to seek and save shepherds. Sinners.

Gentiles. Tax collectors. Scum of the earth, we might say colloquially these days. The lost, the sick, the weak, the foolish, ordinary, everyday, nobodies who are precious to him.

That's who he's come for. Is there any length to which God will not go? Is there anywhere too humble or too lowly for him?

[12:30] The birth of the Messiah in a manger says no way. Even to you. To you who feel unworthy or lowly.

He comes down to you. However far you feel like that is, he comes there. In fact, just where he seems most helpless, he is most strong.

I love that. A similar point being made in John chapter 1. I want to reflect on verse 14 for a couple of minutes. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. The Word became flesh.

Unbelievable. Like really, actually unbelievable. The religious in this day, they didn't have a category for this. The logos, the Word, for them, in their minds it was central to everything.

[13:39] God's creative power. God's creative power. His divine eternality. That he always existed and always would exist. Their only hope.

But of all things, certainly not human. Not fleshly. Not with us or we'll die. On the other hand, the religious didn't have a category for it either.

The logos was in their minds as well, central to everything. A great life principle. The goal of existence. The highest ideal. That's how they talked about logos.

But certainly apart from and outside this world. Not something that we could personally encounter. Absolutely not. The one place you would not expect the logos, the Word, to be found is in a human body.

So ordinary. So beneath his majesty, however you understood it. And yet, that is the wonder of the incarnation, isn't it?

[14:45] God takes on flesh, wraps himself, as it were, in our frailty and walks on the very dust he created.

Theologian J.I. Packer writes, The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child.

The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as the truth of the incarnation.

Truth, stranger than fiction, he says. No one would have come up with this. Nobody would have made it up this way. How is God going to accomplish his mission in the world?

How will he come and rescue his creation? Anybody have any ideas? Well, certainly not by entering into it. That is preposterous. That is not even something that would cross anyone's minds.

[15:46] That is where the problem is in his creation. That is where the pain is, the mess is. God will stay away from that. And yet, he dwells for a while among us.

He comes in flesh. Inside time.

Within human limitations. And dwells among us. He knows what it's like to feel aches and pains. He knows what it's like to wake up with such deep sadness that you just aren't sure you can go on.

He knows what it's like to have people let you down. And no one let you in. And he could have, unlike you, theoretically avoided all of those awful experiences.

But he didn't. The word became flesh. Where we least expected him, he showed up most fully. Not just a bit of God, but his full glory.

[17 : 07] Full of grace. Full of truth. All the perfection of the perfect God. The radiance of his glory that used to kill anyone who looked at it.

The incomprehensible combination of utter grace and absolute truth brought together. Sitting beside you in school.

Working with wood in his dad's shop. Building your cabinets and pulling a splinter out of his finger. Crying next to you at a funeral. You're not alone.

Ever. No matter where you go. No matter what happens. You're not alone. What great comfort is there in that? The word became flesh.

If, like me, you've got some questions for God. You know, some things you just can't wrap your mind or perhaps your heart around about him. That's okay. This is a good place for questions.

[18 : 14] God loves to hear them. I want you to know it's okay to have them. I also want you to know this. He has entered your world. It's not the way we sometimes think that he's far off.

He's actually very near. Whatever that we struggle to comprehend, we can trust him for because he's hurt with us. He's not hiding far off in divine safety, protected from all the struggle.

He has entered into the confusing struggle with us. The one you're living in right now. It is hard to wrap our minds around the reality that God wrapped himself in flesh.

Thou who art God, beyond all praising, all for love's sake, becamest man. One more meditation on this theme from Philippians chapter 2.

Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man.

[19 : 44] This is the first verse of that great Christmas hymn DJ just sang. Thou who wast rich beyond all splendor, all for love's sake becamest poor.

Thrones for a manger didst surrender. Sapphire paved courts for stable floor. Thou who wast rich beyond all splendor, all for love's sake becamest poor.

Jesus didn't cling to the thrones and the glories of heaven. No, he laid them aside to come to earth. In fact, to become a servant.

A servant. Kings in this day, and I think it's fair to say still to this day, they're not known for their humble service, okay? That may be the understatement of the year coming in right at the end.

But the one who is king of kings over all of creation with power and glory beyond any other ruler comes as we would least expect him.

[20 : 53] The king of creation becomes its servant to redeem and restore rebellious subjects and a groaning kingdom. In fact, he would take this humiliation to an unheard of level, to the point of death on a cross.

You all know most kings demand their subjects give their lives for them to protect the king and the king's life. This king gives his life for his subjects to protect them, to give them life.

What a servant! Unlike any other. I mean, think about it. Is there anywhere that you would less expect to find the Lord and giver of life than in a tomb wrapped in grave clothes?

And yet there he is. For our sakes. All for love's sake. Most nations have one king and lots of servants.

Plenty of people to do the dirty work so the king never has to, right? That's the idea. And yet our king is among us as one who serves. Who came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

[22 : 23] Who showed his love for us by washing our dirty feet. And so the shepherds run to an ordinary, everyday manger filled with an ordinary, everyday body belonging to an ordinary, everyday servant and they find God himself.

Where else will we find the holiness and awful power and majesty of God to show up?

Or better yet, if he's there in that manger, where would we not now expect him to show up? This is the way God operates over and over throughout the story, showing up in our everyday lives, right?

Moses is tending sheep just like every other day in the desert when God shows up in a burning bush with a shocking calling, a redemptive mission for him.

When a broken and lonely woman is taking her daily walk to get water, Jesus shows up to talk with her and to transform her life and her community.

[23 : 44] When Saul is on his daily journey to yet another city where he's going to kill some Christians, this time it's Damascus, God shines in an interruption, a name change, and a new mission for Paul.

See, he's the God who all the way back in the Old Testament tells us to teach our kids about him, right? How's that? Is it in one grand presentation? I sure hope Julia remembers her baptism this morning because we're not going to talk about it again.

Is it in just a once a week kind of thing? No, this God says every day when we sit, when we walk, when we lie down, when we rise, whether it's on your bodies, whether it's on your homes, wherever that we can write the truth about him on our hearts, it is to be an everyday experience that we're saying over and over, look kids, God is here with us.

Look kids, God is here with us. Look kids, this is what God is like and how he loves us every day. He loves to show up in the lives of those who are alone, overwhelmed, ashamed of their sinful failures.

The people you'd least expect to see God do something, earth shattering through, and then bam, God shows up with grace for the failure, with strength for the weak and the weary.

[25 : 05] And if you didn't see it coming, and he showed up. When we work, wherever, wherever he takes us each day, he says that he sees us, that we're to work not for the eyes of man, the approval of a boss, but for the eyes of God who shows up to work powerfully in our mundane faithfulness, who says he sees what is done in secret that nobody else sees, but he sees you, and he loves you, and he's working right there.

That's what I want you to leave thinking about today. Don't let Christmas be over, and Jesus get put away from your life with the nativity sets until early December next year.

As you clean up from Christmas, maybe, this year, think, Jesus enters our world. Where is God going to show up in my life?

Right in the everyday this next year, where might he show up? My prayer is that each of us will take the wonder of Christmas, the Messiah in a manger.

The Word become flesh. The King become a servant. That we'll take that wonder into 2025.

[26 : 30] You can count on God's Word always pointing you to the wonder of that Savior, whether you read along with us or on your own every day, you can count on that. Maybe to help your kids, baby Jesus does stay out in his manger in your living room this year as a reminder that God's there.

Or maybe you do something silly like set an alarm on your phone every day for the same random time. Like, I don't know, pick a Scripture reference. 2.16 in the afternoon for Luke 2.16 that says manger.

Or Emmanuel. And every day it goes off, and you stop every day to remember you're not alone. And to see God. Where is he in my everyday right now?

Some of us have already started. I know this stresses some of you out, but some of us like to plan ahead, and so we've already pulled out a 2025 calendar to put some dates on it.

That's coming this week, and that's stressful for some of you. I know you want to enjoy Christmas a little longer, but when you get to the calendar, even if it's three weeks from now, okay, maybe somewhere on each page, you draw a little manger on your calendar, on your planner, whatever it is, as a reminder.

[27 : 46] Whatever helps you, I'm not hung up on that. I want you to remember the truth. This is the truth you need to live in this year. Nothing on your calendar. No place you'll go, no event you'll attend, no plans that you have is safe from God showing up.

From him showing up to do his work, to do what he does, which is to break and recreate your heart and others' hearts. He might show up right there in that event that you've already put on the calendar, and that's scary, isn't it?

That he might show up and might break my heart where I don't expect it, but he always is putting you back together too. So it's scary, but it is really exciting.

I hope that you can go into every day this year with that kind of excitement, that God is going to be here with me in this everyday moment. He's with you because he's for you. He's working in you,

and he's working through you all the time.

Some of you shared recently at our Thanksgiving service about how God has met you in life and death situations. He's met you in cancer treatments. He's met you in painful moments of parenting. [28 : 58] Whatever you're going through today, God will show up. You can ask him right now. You can stop listening right now and just say, God, please show up. I need you right where I am today.

A 90-year-old woman who was familiar with God walked into our grief group gathering just a couple weeks ago. She kind of wandered in late. We were in the middle of conversation, but after sitting there for a couple of minutes, she shared that she had just not long ago lost her husband.

But after she shared that, she pretty quickly said, you know, do y'all ever wonder if you'll go to the same place that your spouse went to when he died?

I mean, does anybody else wonder this? Because he was just such a good man. He taught Sunday school at church for years. He was always kind to everybody, and I've just been really struggling with him.

Am I going to go to the same place that he is? Because I don't feel like I'm as good as him. In a beautiful God moment, Martha Brady got to remind her neighbor of the good news of Christmas, that she was struggling to apply in her everyday grief.

[30 : 19] It was something she knew, but she'd forgotten. God's not looking for you to perform your way up to him. He's come down to you. And in fact, he met us right in that everyday conversation in a retirement home, and we got to celebrate his grace together.

I've told you before of Susanna Wesley. Number 25 of 25 kids. Can you imagine? I don't know how forgotten she felt, but she grew up to have 19 of her own.

Lost several of them in infancy, but there were still many running around all the time, and God met her when she was overwhelmed. She would famously throw her apron over her head, and her kids knew that meant leave her alone.

She was talking with God. They were talking, and we would talk when they were finished. Right in the midst of the chaos, there was God.

And two of Susanna's boys, John and Charles, grew up to found Methodism and share the gospel with people around the world and leave us beautiful songs of the God who shows up in the manger like, Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

[31 : 28] Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see. Hail the incarnate deity. See, they learned that if Jesus came in the manger, if Jesus came to the apron, he'll come to our everyday lives.

They knew that. See, God's glory and grace and truth will show up to you. We all need him every day, and they'll show up through you because we all bear his image every day and everywhere we go.

You've told me of how he's shown up in performance review meetings at work, that you were dreading, and you ended up getting to care for someone who was anxious. You've told me about lonely kids at school who never expected you to sit with them.

Who then became lifelong friends. Moments with someone walking in the neighborhood or working out next to you who all of a sudden feels the weight of the world crashing in on them and finds you as the one who can listen and pray.

God shows up when you walk through the grocery store checkout line and treat the cashier like the image bearer of God that they are, the eternal being full of his image, and the earth becomes in that moment just a little bit more full of his glory reflected in us.

[32 : 51] How will you see and show his glory and grace and truth this year? It's exciting to think about because I don't know. Maybe you've got some ideas. Maybe you don't have an idea.

Any idea at all. That's okay. He's usually got a much better plan. If you'll listen to his word and follow it to see Jesus, he shows up wherever you least expect him because he's pursuing you.

Not just 2,000 years ago at Christmas. He keeps pursuing you. Even and perhaps especially if you're running away from him, he is pursuing you.

Even if you don't want to be found, he is pursuing you. See, he's been to the manger, right? He won't lose track of you. You aren't too far down.

You're not too far away for him. You're not too far gone for him to get to you. He stays with you whether you put the baby away with your nativity scene or not.

[33 : 58] Emmanuel has come to stay. He's come to make blessing flow far as the curse is found.

He's come to raise the sons of earth with him back to the glories of heaven. Merry Christmas. Let's worship him in prayer.

Jesus, all praise, honor, and glory be to you. the one who is above all and yet has brought God's presence to the lowly.

Thank you. Thank you that you're with us never to leave us. Emmanuel is not a Christmas word alone. It is an everyday truth that we need and we love and we get to share.

would you so work in us that we would live every moment of every day this year aware of your presence conscious of your power and eager to proclaim your praise.

[35 : 04] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org
Music