

I remember Christmas Eve in my family growing up as one of the busiest and most stressful days of the whole year. My mom spent practically the whole day in the kitchen, cooking and getting things ready for the big Christmas Eve dinner. It was our tradition to decorate the tree on Christmas Eve, which meant sometimes that we actually went to get it that day. We were finishing up with the cleaning, present wrapping or sometimes present shopping. And in the midst of it we as kids didn't want to miss some of the favorite Christmas movies that were on all day. I remember that several Christmas Eves my mom didn't make it to church for there was just still too much that needed to be done.

I don't know what you're last couple days looked like, but something tells me that they were pretty busy, that you were on the run, trying to get all things ready, cooking, cleaning, present shopping and wrapping, plus there is work, and school, and all the other things. Somewhere in there you probably tried to squeeze in Advent devotions, prayers, reading of the Bible, so that you can be at least little bit ready for this moment, for the evening when Christ was born. (pause) Busy, tired, and stressed out, maybe even irritated..., do these words describe the past couple days? They describe ours. Even though I remember thinking when I was younger that when I will have my own family, our Christmas preparations won't be stressful.

Now we finally made it here to church, on Christmas Eve and we read the Gospel of Luke. (pause) *"In those days, when Christ was born, a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered."* That doesn't sound like a calm and peaceful event. Everyone had to go to their hometown? Can you imagine the roads? Talking about holiday traffic... ☺ But seriously, this was especially bad timing for one couple, Joseph and Mary his fiancée who were expecting a child any time now. You might be thinking, that might have been pretty stressful and busy time for Mary and Joseph, they had to figure out how they're going to travel, where they'll stay, what to pack for the road. Will the baby wait or is it going to be born in the midst of this madness? Talking about busyness, tiredness, and stress...

But this is not the only thing that was on Mary's and Joseph's minds. Oh no, there is something much bigger that is troubling their minds, for both of them had been visited not that long time ago. The Bible says, they were visited by angel of the Lord who told them that Mary

is going to have a son who will be the Savior of the world. They were told, this baby is going to be the Son of God.

You know all of this, and I know you pondered it many times, and I know it troubled your mind before, for how could this be? Can this be for real? (pause) Mary and Joseph had the same thoughts, they probably even had their doubts, for even two thousand years ago it wasn't normal that an angel of the Lord would appear to a young girl, telling her that she'll give birth to a Son of God. We're not much different from Mary and Joseph, our lives and struggles aren't much different from theirs. Pause

And then it happened. They almost made it, after a long and tiring journey they arrived to Bethlehem but it is night and everything is closed or possible places where they could stay are full. And the time has come; there isn't a minute to spare. Joseph had to act quickly to make sure Mary will be able to give birth to her child in an appropriate place. (pause) Two months ago I was in the Overlake hospital as Andrea was giving birth to George. It was pretty stressful, I was sitting on the chair by her head, with a sterilized robe on, watching a team of doctors do their job. Something tells me that Mary and Joseph had it much worse. With no place for them in the inn, the baby is born anyway, in the stable, wrapped in bands of cloth, laid in the manger. (pause)

God didn't wait for Mary and Joseph or citizens of Bethlehem or shepherd or anyone else to be ready, he simply came, to be among us, to be with us. He became one of us so that we can finally meet him face to face, in the midst of our busyness, stress, worries, whatever we're going through. God said ready or not, I'm coming to you. Because I love you and I want to be there for you. God didn't care for the perfect moment nor conditions for his Son. All that mattered was that he was born for you and me.

There were shepherds living in that region, out in the fields, alone, not very highly esteemed by other citizens of Judea. And yet we read that the angel of the Lord appeared to them and said: *"Do not be afraid, for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people, TO YOU is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."* If you don't remember anything from my sermon, or this whole worship service, please remember this one thing, no matter how unworthy, busy, doubting, tired, frightened or sinful you might

feel, TO YOU is born this day a Savior and his name is Jesus, or Emmanuel, which means God is with us. Nothing or no one can take this Good New away from you. God has done it for you, and speaks to you tonight saying, “do not be afraid, I love you just the way you are, wherever you are, whoever you are.” (pause)

I know we're all busy, stressed out and tired, this is the world we live in, it's not any different from the world Mary, Joseph and shepherds lived in. But when the angels had left, the Shepherds said to one another, “*let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made know to us.*” They went with haste to greet this baby of Bethlehem. They believed in the good news and thus it became true for them. Mary pondered all these events in her heart. She believed what was promised to her and thus she became the mother of God, and the Lord was with her. Joseph believed the angel appearing to him in the dream and thus he encountered the true miracle of Christmas and was able to find peace, and strength in the midst of it.

Tonight just like the holy family or shepherds we see a baby lying in the manger, we sing together with angels praising God, we hear the good news of peace and joy that's proclaimed to us all. Tonight we believe in our hearts that it all happened for us, tonight we know that we're loved, forgiven and cherished children of God.

Amen