

The Text: Mt.1.18-25; Lk.2.1-20

Date: December 24, 2011. Christmas Eve.

Sermon: Not a Reindeer Story

## **I. Scripture**

**Matthew 1:18-25** (NASB95)

<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. <sup>20</sup> But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup> Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.” <sup>24</sup> And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, <sup>25</sup> but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

**Luke 2:1-20** (NASB95)

<sup>1</sup> Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. <sup>2</sup> This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. <sup>4</sup> Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, <sup>5</sup> in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. <sup>8</sup> In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; <sup>11</sup> for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> “This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” <sup>15</sup> When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup> So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

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<sup>1</sup> New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995. LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

## **II. Introduction**

I remember the Christmas concerts of Linda's and my youth.

Mrs. Rogers, no relation to Mr. Rogers, (well actually she was his wife, but not the one on TV) had about a dozen kids scattered throughout grades 1-7, all crammed into one room in the back of the community hall at Wasa Lake.

Each year she was expected to put on a concert that would entertain the whole community.

I think her job must have depended upon it because these were huge productions and it seemed to me we pretty much ceased to do any real schoolwork from about mid October until Christmas.

Come the night of the concert all of us "would be" thespians, each playing several different parts in the elaborate play, gathered an hour early at the school to get costumed up.

Man did we ever have the butterflies ... especially Mrs. Rogers.

The hall would fill up.

We would peak through the bed sheet curtains ... everybody was there.

The lights would be dimmed.

And then it would start.

And then, before you knew it, it was over, or at least it seemed like that.

There was the post performance euphoria: I remember that.

And about the time that amazing drug was just kicking in, Santa Clause would suddenly burst in the heavy hall door, bellowing at the top of his lungs in a deep base voice that sounded a lot like Grandpa's, "HO HO HO HO; ARE THERE ANY GOOD LITTLE BOYS AND GIRLS IN HERE."

Of course we were all very good little boys and girls; at least that night we were, even my friend Ricky.

Santa would stomp down the isle up to the huge Christmas tree at the front of the hall.

Down from his back came a great humungous sack with a great big whack on the fground.

And just when Santa was about to dig into it, and we were at the height of shivering expectation, suddenly the door to the hall would burst open again and the head and neck of a humongous reindeer would burst into the hall.

It looked a lot like Ernie Shaw's shoulder mount trophy 6-point mule deer buck, but it had bright red lights flashing in each nostril of his nose. Icy steam was wafting in through the door, and there was a great uproar of stomping feet and shaking horns and the raunchiest rude reindeer racket you have ever heard.

Kids would be screaming in horror and delight; the littlest diving under the chairs that their mothers sat on.

And suddenly Santa Clause would turn around from diving into his sack of toys and bellow at the top of his lungs: "*Get outta her Rudolph. Get outta here right now before you mess on the floor.*"

Rudolph would back out of the door and the heavy door would slam shut with a huge bang.

Santa would turn around and dive into his sack once again.

And again the door would burst open.

The reindeer would barge in again, just up to its shoulders, and the whole performance would repeat itself.

In fact the whole reindeer performance would repeat itself up to 3 or 4 times until finally the deer would leave.

But that wasn't the end.

Rudolph would show up in the window and be rattling his horns against the glass, flashing his bright red nose and Santa would be bellowing all the more.

And we would be screaming all the more.

Suddenly Santa would shoulder his heavy sack again, turn and go charging out the door hollering at Rudolph.

We would all let out screams of disappointment.

Santa was leaving without giving us any toys.

But after a bit he would come stomping back in the door with his sack again.

Apparently he had only gone out to tie Rudolph to the hitching post.

Santa would apologies and slowly and thoughtfully lay his sack down again.

We would all be staring at the sack as Santa would pull up a chair and slowly say, "*Have I ever told you about old Rudolph.*"

And before we could all say “yes” to try and get the jolly fat man to get on with the presents before another reindeer interruption, Santa would burst into the song that told Rudolph’s story.

In a deep base baritone voice he would sing:

*Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*

*Had a very shiny nose,*

*And if you ever saw it,*

*You would even say it glows.*

*All of the other reindeer*

*Used to laugh and call him names;*

*They never let poor Rudolph*

*Join in any reindeer games.*

*Then one foggy Christmas Eve,*

*Santa came to say,*

*Rudolph with your nose so bright,*

*Won't you guide my sleigh tonight?*

*Then how the reindeer loved him*

*As they shouted out with glee,*

*Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,*

*You'll go down in history.<sup>2</sup>*

And then Santa handed out the presents ... and that was about it.

Or so it seemed at the time.

The problem was, there was something else going on.

Deep in the inner most part of my being, I was appropriating the reindeer story as the Christmas story.

And so, when it came time for me to hear the real Christmas story, the story we all heard read a few minutes ago, I simply laid it over top of the reindeer story.

I became a believer in Christ with what Craig Larson, calls the “*Rudolph-the-Red-Nosed-Reindeer syndrome.*”

Larson writes: *There have been periods in my life when I have fallen prey to the Rudolph-the-Red-Nosed-Reindeer syndrome. In the reindeer pecking order, Rudolph was a nobody. Then came that foggy Christmas Eve, when*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.metrolyrics.com/rudolph-the-red-nosed-reindeer-lyrics-christmas-carols.html#ixzz1hIvhGmBp>  
Copied from MetroLyrics.com

*Rudolph had an ability that others valued—a nose that glowed in the dark. After he saved Christmas, the song says, “Then all the reindeer loved him. ... “I thought that if “my nose glowed in the dark,” I would be accepted and loved. This mentality seems to be driven by the real world. The world revolves around performance: do what others value to earn money and pay the bills; express love to family and friends to have healthy relationships. ... that assumption has even affected my relationship with God.<sup>3</sup>*

### **III. The Text (Mt.1.18-25; Lk.2.1-20)**

If I am bone honest, I still wrestle with the “*Rudolph-the-Red-Nosed-Reindeer syndrome.*”

But here’s the thing.

The Christmas story, the true Christmas story, is not a reindeer story. The true Christmas story as we heard it read a few minutes ago is all about the birth of the Son of God, by a virgin.

And its whole point is that this baby comes as the Savior of God for the world ... for you ... for me.

And whether or not our nose glows in the dark has nothing to do with it. It’s not about my performance, or your performance, pleasing God or Humanity.

In fact, the most amazing thing about the baby born in a manger is what the angel Gabriel tells everyone, including the young betrothed mother, the confused dad with his own catalogue of sins, and the shocked shepherds perhaps the lowest of society: “*Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*” (Luke 2:10-12, NASB95)<sup>4</sup>

The angel made it even more clear to Joseph: “... *do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”*” (Matthew 1:20-21, NASB95)<sup>5</sup>

The true Christmas story is not a reindeer story.

It is not a story about those who perform well, with noses glowing, getting loved and accepted and forgiven by God and man.

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<sup>3</sup>Larson, C. B. (1998). *Vol. 2: Pastoral grit*. The pastor's soul series ;; Library of leadership development. Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> *New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995. LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>5</sup> *New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995. LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Its about those whose noses are caked in the muck and the guck of sin;  
its about sinners getting loved, and accepted and forgiven by God.  
That is what salvation means; that's what Christmas celebrates; that's  
what the Christ child gives to you and I as his gift.

The apostle Paul, whose catalogue of past sins included things from  
brutal religious persecution to complicity in murder, would meet this  
saving Christ and accept his salvation and be radically changed by it.  
Later he would write: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—  
and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no  
one can boast."* (Ephesians 2:8-9, NIV) <sup>6</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The Christmas story is not a reindeer story.

It's not about whether your nose glows in the dark.

It's not your good performance that gets you loved, accepted and forgiven  
by God.

It's about God, loving you while you are still a sinner, sending his son into  
the world to save you from your sin.

And it's about you and I accepting this free gift and being changed by its  
sheer grace.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.