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Hope Lutheran Church

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Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

I love Christmas. I love everything about it, I love the certainty of what Christmas brings. When I was growing up, my family had a schedule for Christmas, we had a plan, every year, without fail about what would happen. On Christmas eve, we would always go to my Grandma's house, on my dad's side of the family. We go there about noon, have hors d'oeuvres, and we would go to Church at 3:00. In the meantime, a heated debate about the Prime Rib would take place, and how it was to be cooked, for what amount of time and at what temperature to ensure a perfectly cooked meal. Then when we would get home, we would eat dinner and then we would open gifts, going youngest to oldest as an entire family, which was always followed by dessert, my grandpas homemade ice cream.

Then on Christmas morning, my siblings and I would wake up early, we would go and jump on my parents bed forcing them to wake up. And we would open the gifts under the tree as a family. Then we would have breakfast and go to my Grandma's on my mom's side for Christmas with that side of the family. When you get to me grandma's the first thing you do is immediately go to the plate of Christmas cookies that my grandpa had made the day before, then we would have lunch, ham this time, and open gifts, followed by dessert, usually a selection of

pies. Christmas every year, was perfectly planned, it was a great time spent with friends and family, great food and fellowship.

But that first Christmas, for Joseph and Mary, there wasn't much certainty, there wasn't much of a plan. There was fear, and there was probably confusion at all that had taken place those last nine months... This could not have seemed according to plan for Joseph and Mary, they most certainly saw some tough times ahead. Things must not have seemed great either, when they were told that there was no room for them inside, especially for this pregnant woman who had just traveled a long way. So instead of a nice, 3-star hotel room, they sent her to a stable. A STABLE. You know, where they keep real life animals.

This setting was not as glamorous and cute as we have painted it out to be. Mary was about to have a baby, without any doctors, without any sterile medical equipment, no actual bed, and when she finally had this child, she will then have put it him in a manger, the thing that these animals eat out of... This Christmas was not a night of silence, or peace, most likely, but instead of annoyance, and possibly some frustration, I would not have wanted to be the innkeeper who told Joseph to move out to the stable...

This first Christmas was most likely not how Mary and Joseph had planned for it to go. But it was amongst this frustrating, uncomfortable, smelly, dirty, mess, that the Word became flesh. The God who laid the foundations of the earth, the one who brought His people out of the Egypt, who wiped out nations, who promised a savior, did not come down with might, or in great power, or spectacle. But instead, God came down into his creation in the messiest, most uncomfortable, and vulnerable way possible... As a baby, lying in a manger.

When we look at it this way, God came down in pathetic fashion. It is actually offensive to think that God, who came down from his heavenly throne, could not even get a room in the local inn, but instead was greeted with a bundle of picked through hay and a cow or two staring at him. But this baby Jesus, is God's plan. The plan that was prophesied throughout the history of Israel. A prophesy of a baby from the line of David, born in the City of Bethlehem, this savior would come and shepherd his flock, and he would be their peace.

This Jesus, our Lord, is the one who came down into this mess. This mess of a manger, this mess of a stable, but something that is even more incredible is that He came down into this mess of a world. He came down into a world where there was war, violence, and injustice. Jesus came down into this world that is full of sin and death.

The manger wasn't the extent of this messiness that Christ would encounter. Throughout Christ's life he would encounter people who were sick, couldn't walk, they were cruel, they were tax collectors and adulterers. They were messy. Sometimes it is tempting, when we read the bible, or look back at human history to say, thank goodness I am not like they were. Or wow, those people in the Bible, they were awful. Sometimes we look at ourselves and we think we are doing pretty good. We feel like we have become a better society, and even a better person...

We look around the world, and every day there is more and more that seems to be going on. Turning on the news every day we see a world painted by suffering, and despair. A world that is full of disappointment, and brokenness. A world full of sin and death. Sometimes we think, well I haven't done these things. But we do not need to turn on the news to see this either. We simply just need to get up... and look in the mirror every morning. We look in the mirror and we see that messy person standing there. And we know that there is nothing we can do about it...

But this is where the good news is. See Christmas isn't just about the manger, or the stable, or an inn. It is about God's plan for us sinful people. It is about God breaking into our messy world, and becoming that sinful mess for us. It's about Christ going to the messiest place possible... the cross, where he was sent to die, and was forsaken by His Father because it was all a part of His plan. It is about Christ coming into the world, and not only becoming the mess, becoming the sin for the people who lived 2000 years ago, but also for you and for me.

And what's truly amazing is that Christ didn't JUST come 2000 years ago, but Christ has and continues to come into this mess here and now as well. This plan continues to play itself out. As Christ comes into this mess every week in his Word, he comes in the water, in the bread, and in the wine. And during this advent season, when so many people will be experiencing sadness, loneliness, and emptiness, we are not only waiting in anticipation for Christmas Day, we are still waiting for that day when Christ will return, and all the people will sing Joy to the World.

Because this was God's plan all along... This was not some coincidence; it was not something that God just threw together. This promise remains true, it remains certain. God's plan is perfect. In a world full of imperfection, messiness, and sin, God's plan was to send in perfection. So that this perfection would come and die, and be our peace. This perfection was sent in the form of a baby... And this perfection will come again on the clouds of heaven. Because God's plan is not finished yet. So we await that day, in peace, in hope, and in joy, for behold this baby named Jesus has come, and he has died for each and every one of us, and he is coming back again. Amen.

