SERMON
St. Peter's UCC
December 21, 2025
"Angels, Dreams, and Miracles"

Scripture:
Romans 1:1-7 Salutation
Psalm 80:1-4, 17-19
Matthew 1:18-25 The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

The Advent and birth stories in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew are full of moments with angels and dreams; angels, and dreams of heaven breaking into our world. As real as day for those who experienced it in the Bible, but God knew that our world needed more than angels and dreams to truly close the gap between heaven and earth. We needed nothing less than a heavenly Savior.

Real life in a real world, come to us from heaven. Angels, dreams and visions are a part of our biblical faith, but in the birth story, heaven has truly come to earth and shared our common lot. A birth in a stall, with a feeding trough as a crib, because of no room in the inn. That's real life

from the get-go; not just some perfect little story, but a real story with a real birth, and hardship.

And yet, within this story, this story of one born of woman, fully human, there is that other side of the story; there is a divine side of the birth story; a side that carries with it a touch of heaven, for Jesus wasn't just human, he was divine; heaven incarnate.

The birth of a child, any child, is often considered to be about as close to a miracle as we can experience in life, but this birth, this holy birth celebrated around the entire world every Christmas, holds a sense of the miraculous beyond what we know, even beyond what can really be explained. Christmas is so much more than an explanation. Christmas holds within it the spirit of what we really long for; it holds within it a glimpse of what we really wish for. Christmas is the hint that what we hope for is not just a dream, but rather a birth; a child come into our world. Christmas is heaven, or a taste of it, at least. It finds us in countless ways in countless settings; alone or with family or in church, or in moments hardly expected, but still magical and holy; so much so that attempts at a

description of a holy, heavenly moment at Christmas often ends with a pause, because explanation can only go so far when it comes to the celebration of the holy child's birth.

One Christmas Eve when I was a young adult and still living just outside of Buffalo, it was late and most people were asleep; certainly the little children. I went for a walk around the village; just walking. Outside Christmas lights were softly glowing, and snowflakes were slowly drifting to the ground. It was beautiful, but what filled my soul that night was the silence, as if a great and excited expectation had created a hush on the night. There was, in every home, a renewed innocence, reawakened, if only for a night, when we allow ourselves to hope and smile and believe again. We make room for Christmas. We sing and light candles and pause, and we listen, almost as if we can hear a baby's cry and a mother's soft words, because it was more than dreams and angels and visions. Christmas came into our world born of woman.

This one born of Mary, on that silent, holy night, grew, and then began his ministry. Others accompanied him and walked with him in

those brief years, and our Bible holds their account. Then they shared with the next generation, and the next, and now we share a story that transcends the years and brings light to every darkness. Yes, Christmas is more than just angels and dreams. Christmas heralded a new hope for all the world; a new light; a love from heaven that cannot and will not allow us to accept the darkness as our reality and our fate. No, not at all. Christmas is heaven reminding us that light always prevails over darkness, and that love, even the innocent love of that holy birth, is stronger than any definition of strength in this world.

All Christians at this time of year hope and pray that we may receive the beauty, the peace, the joy, and the love of Christmas into our hearts and spirits. But, as Christians, as the church, we don't stop there. That's because we are the body of Christ in the world, and the world's darkness desperately needs our light. It is our calling to be the hope that some long for, to be the belief that some desperately wish they could find. It is for us to be the assurance that the magic of Christmas is no dream, but rather, a gift from God; a true glimpse of heaven.

For every person out there who feels discouragement more than hope, for every bah humbug, so-called realist out there who has no good news to offer, is someone who quietly hopes that they are wrong; that light and hope will prevail, and that darkness and discouragement are just for a time. Christmas is the perfect message to lift the spirits of those caught in the struggles of this world. And it's for us to bring assurance that such a message, such a spirit is true and everlasting.

In this season of Christmas, when we speak of angels, and dreams, and miracles, the Good News is that such things are not simply wonderful, beautiful exceptions to our reality here on earth. No, not at all, because for Christians, we joyfully proclaim that this glimpse of heaven is a window into God's eternity. It is for us to remember instead that it's the struggles, the sorrows, and the fears of this world that are but for a time.

Henny Youngman, the old time comedian, said that he once wanted to become an atheist, but he gave up - they have no holidays. Oh, what a dreary, sad world it would be without Christmas. Sometimes at Christmas, people have more hope, not because they are people of faith, but just

because it feels good to have a time of renewed hope. How I wish we could reach them more and more with a true hope from heaven, come unto us; Emmanuel, God with us. Sometimes in this season of Christmas, people feel more joy, not because they are very religious, but only because it feels good to have permission for everyone to feel more joyous. How I long to bring them true joy that is everlasting, and not just for a time. And then there are the special moments when Christmas falls quietly upon us like silent snow, and without anticipation or knowing, when we suddenly feel a peace that goes beyond all understanding; a peace that needs no justification from the world; not at all, but is just as true and real as the stars shining down on our world.

I'm not shy about repeating poems I like, and I know that I shared this poem – a story, really – some years back. It's called The Last Christmas Tree. The author is unknown:

I saw a truck of Christmas trees
And each one had a tale,
The driver stood them in a row
And put them up for sale.

He strung some twinkly lights
And hung a sign up with a nail;
"FRESH CHRISTMAS TREES"
It said in red
"FRESH CHRISTMAS TREES FOR SALE."

He poured himself hot cocoa
In a steaming thermos cup,
And snowflakes started falling
As a family car pulled up.

A mom, a dad, and one small boy
Who looked no more than three
Jumped out and started searching
For the perfect Christmas tree.

The boy marched up and down the rows,
His nose high in the air;
It smells like Christmas, mom!
It smells like Christmas everywhere!

Let's get the biggest tree we can!
A tree that's ten miles high!
A tree to go right through our roof!
A tree to touch the sky!

A tree SO big
That Santa Claus
Will stop and stare and say,
"'Now, THAT'S the finest Christmas tree
I've seen this Christmas Day!'"

It seemed they looked at every tree
At least three million times;
Dad shook them, pinched them, turned them 'round
To find the perfect pine.

I've found it, mom!
The Christmas tree I like the best of all!
It's got a little bare spot,
But we'll turn that to the wall!

We'll put great-grandma's angel
"On top the highest bough!
Oh, can we buy it?
Please, mom, PLEASE?!
Oh, can we buy it NOW?

"How 'bout some nice hot cocoa?"
Asked the man who owned the lot.
He twisted off the thermos top,
"Now, THIS will hit the spot!"

He poured the steaming chocolate
In three tiny paper cups.
They toasted,
"Here's to Christmas!"
And they drank the cocoa up.

"Is this your choice?"
The tree man asked,
"This pine's the best one here!"
The boy seemed sad---
My daddy says
The price is just too dear.

"Then, Merry Christmas!"
Said the man, who wrapped the tree in twine,
"It's yours for just one promise
You must keep at Christmas time!"

On Christmas Eve at bedtime
As you fold your hands to pray,
Promise in your heart
To keep the joy of Christmas Day!

"Now hurry home!
This freezy wind
Is turning your cheeks pink!
And ask your dad to trim that trunk and give that tree a drink!"
And so it went on
All that blustery eve
As the tree man gave
Tree upon tree upon tree

To every last person
Who came to the lot---
Who toasted with cocoa
In small paper cups,

Who promised the promise
Of joy in their hearts------
And singing out carols,
Drove off in the dark.

And when it was over
One tree stood alone;
But no one was left there
To give it a home.

The tree man put on his
Red parka and hood
And dragged the last Christmas tree
Out to the woods.

He left the pine right by a stream
In the cold,
So the wood's homeless creatures
Could make it their home.

He smiled as he brushed off
Some snow from his beard,
When out of the thicket
A reindeer appeared.

He scratched that huge reindeer
On top his huge head---
"It looks like we've
Started up Christmas again!"

"There are miles more to travel,
And much more to do!
Let's go home, my friend,
And get started anew!"

He looked to the sky
And heard jingle bells sound---
And then,
In a twinkling,
That tree man was gone!

Is this story, this poem, true? Well, the spirit of it is, and I hope it is for you.

The whole world of Christianity everywhere is remembering the gift of the Christ child this week, and the heavenly gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love. Now God asks us to make these heavenly gifts real in our time; that we can dare to dream; that we can envision heaven on earth. And so, we cry out for all the world, saying, "Do you hear what I hear?" of Angels "sweetly singing o'er the plain." When better to call to all, "Joy to the world," to call on all to hear "heaven and nature sing;" for unto us a child is born, a Savior, who shall reign forever.

Glory to God in the highest. Amen.