**First Reading Isaiah 9:2-7**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-- on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulder, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

**Psalm 96**

1Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth**2**Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.**3**Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. **4**For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. **5**For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.**6**Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

**7**Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. **8**Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.
**9**Worship the Lord in the splendor of his[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm%2096&version=NIV#fen-NIV-15475a)] holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.
**10**Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns.” The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. **11**Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the sea resound, and all that is in it. **12**Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. **13**Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.

**Second Lesson Titus 2:11-14**

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and

godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He, it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

**Gospel Luke 2:1-20**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see--I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, 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 known to us." So, they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

**Sermon**

 Tonight, I’d like to talk to you about the story How the Grinch Stole Christmas. First of all, I love this story. I love the original cartoon, which follows the book pretty closely. I’ve never actually watched the movie version with Jim Carey. And I’ve recently become aware of a newer cartoon version that my daughter has watched that looks cute. I love the story because of its

ending, of course. To be honest, it brings tears to my eyes. It did as I read it to my daughter a week or two ago. It does when I watch the cartoon as well.

 But here is what I’m thinking this year. What is it that moves the Grinch so deeply that his heart grows 3 sizes? It seems that he is moved by the idea that Christmas is not about the ribbons, the tags, the packages, boxes or bags. He is stunned that his plan to steal Christmas did not work, but he is moved that the Who’s celebrate anyway. He realizes that there is more to Christmas than all the stuff he stole, and yet something about the Who’s ability to celebrate

without it all moves him to give it all back. But I personally am not sure what “it” was that moved him, that grew his heart, his understanding.

 I’m a thinker…or I should say, I’m an overthinker. I run the risk of overthinking a children’s Christmas classic. And yet some of those children’s Christmas classics were written to help us reflect on the meaning of Christmas. What I see as so touching about this seemingly silly story is that the Grinch saw something so unexpected happen that it moved him from hating Christmas to celebrating it. Never in a million years did he expect that the Who’s would get up and sing anyway. They celebrated anyway, without all the “stuff’ of Christmas. This went beyond the Grinch’s understanding…he couldn’t wrap his mind around it…but it certainly touched his heart and moved him to celebrate with the Who’s.

 The story of the birth of Christ has a similar power to it. It is a story that is so far removed from our current experience. We can’t relate to an Emperor who snaps his fingers and upends everyone’s life. There is no Air B & B so Mary and Joseph can book a place ahead of time. There is no Uber to get them to Bethlehem quickly. There is no social media to announce the big news nor Navi to guide the first visitors to the location of the Holy Family. Overall, the story is kind of ancient and even a little strange.

 And yet…it’s touching in a way that we can’t really explain. This story is the reason that people are gathering together all around the world and worshipping, celebrating, praising God. People are gathering around this story in Bethlehem, the Holy Land, despite the terrible loss of life and destruction that has happened this past year. People are gathering around this story in Ukraine in the midst of a war that has scattered the people, destroyed their land and caused serious injuries to the young people who stayed behind to defend their country. People are gathering around this story in various places despite the difficult personal circumstances with

which they are struggling. You are here, gathered around this story because there is something about it that is beyond our grasp, beyond our understanding of how the world operates. We NEED a story like this, even if we can’t explain it.

 This story, as out of touch with our world as it may be, is the story of God breaking into our lives. THAT is what we need. This story conveys the reality that God has come among us, come into our broken world, into our broken lives and has taken up residence here. And while Emperor Augustus upends everyone’s life, God comes in Jesus to give peace to all people. While no one has a room to offer the holy family, God comes in Jesus to make room in God’s family for anyone and everyone. While the shepherd go about their business tending their sheep in the dark of night, God’s heavenly choir breaks the darkness with a momentary

announcement of the one who will break up the darkness of those who are struggling forevermore.

 There is something moving about this story that marks the beginning of God With Us. Each of us may be moved by a different part. But all of us are moved by, in need of a God who operates in this world so very differently from what we expect. This is what allows us to look at the world as broken as it is, to look at our lives as imperfect as they are and know that God is in the midst of it all to give peace to all people, to make room in God’s family for anyone and everyone, to break up the darkness in which we often struggle.

 God has come in Jesus and the world has never been the same. The birth of Jesus was just the beginning, as he touched the world through his life, through his death and through his resurrection. God, through Christ, has forever been born into our lives and through God with us everything is not always going to be the way we expect it. We not only come together tonight to be touched, to be moved by this story of the birth of Christ. We come together tonight along with communities around the world to bear witness to the fact that THIS is the story, the moment that changed the world, that give hope to those in despair, that brings peace in places of division, in hearts in turmoil, that welcomes all people, even when we are feeling displaced.

 Christ is born. God is with us. This good news has the capacity to transform humanity’s grinchy ways. God with us allows us to experience the awe-inspiring moments about which we will puzzle but never be able to understand. God with us makes for joy and peace and love.

God with us moves us to join in the song, the celebration of the ages that sings no matter what we have or don’t have. Amen.

