

Sermon December 24 2021 Christmas Eve JaQuan Beachem

SCRIPTURE:

Isaiah 9:2-7: Christ's Birth is Foretold

²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. ³You 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. ⁴For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. ⁶For 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. ⁷His 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.

Luke 1:26-35, 38: The Angel Gabriel Salutes Mary

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 2:1-7: The Birth of Jesus

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph 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. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And 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.

Luke 2:8-14: The Shepherds and the Angels

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

Matthew 2:1-12: The Visit of the Wise Men

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’” ⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

John 1:1-14: The Word Became Flesh

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of

the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

SERMON: “(Birthing) Light (In the Dark)” The Rev. JaQuan Beachem

Good evening! I would like to speak to you from message entitled “Birthing Light In the Dark.” Or “Light.” Or “Remember Your Peppermints.”

Mary. Mother Mary. Hail Mary. Full of grace. Full of love. Ready to birth love.

I admit I did not grow up in a tradition that magnified Mary all that much. Though, on this evening Mary is on my mind. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is on my mind. The one who calls us to birth a bundle of joy, of love, of hope, even in the dark, as the world is turning upside down. Mary is on my mind.

Another Mary, Mary of Bethany, who reminded us of the value of taking a moment to listen, taking a moment to give our undivided attention to a Savior. This evening Mary is on my mind.

Mary, mother of my father. Mary, my nana. My late Nana Mary, who raised two sons on her own because her husband passed away young. My nana, Mary, also taken away too soon, before I truly had a chance to know her. This evening Mary is on my mind.

On this Christmas Eve, on my first as an ordained reverend, I am thinking of my mother, not a Mary, but a Rachel -- who gave birth to me early in the morning in my grandparents' home on the 26th of December some years ago. She has been modeling for me how one births light ever since.

Will you pray with me? God of Joy, Grant us faith. May your presence be known among us. May the same love and light that is in you be born in us, so that we may sing new songs of gladness and move in peace. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Birthing Light In The Dark. How do we birth anything in a time where it feels that each time we move a couple paces forward we get knocked a few paces back? When we are knocked by yet another cancelled travel plan, by yet another diagnosis, by yet another disheartening news update, by yet another day of waiting.

Friends, in this season, as you seek to birth light, to birth joy, to birth a new thing in the dark, I invite you to remember your peppermints. Beloved, I know that you may be thinking that I've truly lost it, and maybe I have! But let me explain.

Growing up, when in town, I attended church with my grandparents in South Carolina. We would rise early in the morning to attend three services, including Sunday School. But before I left the house, I would be sure to go to our sparkling glass jar and grab a handful of peppermints, and shove them into my pocket. Peppermints were my way of keeping time, keeping time through the services. I would ration them out in the pew.

Theologically, I wonder if you can see how the red and white swirls can call us to remember. To remember one whose blood was spilled and body was broken, the one whose birth we are remembering this evening. In this season of peppermint mocha lattes and such, may the peppermint be a reminder to commune together, to gather together in the face of changing times, perhaps even in the absence of what we once knew.

If you enjoy peppermints as I did in my youth, then you know that peppermint candies can get kind of messy. May we live into the stickiness, and move through the messiness as we adjust and re-adjust to an ever-changing world. Mary, mother of Jesus, did. Mary embraced the messiness and smelliness of the manger to give birth to a bundle of joy. With Joseph, believing faithfully, they prepared to birth light in the dark.

As protocols change, as boosters are received, may we remember that we have a theology for this. This isn't quite our first rodeo. In some ways, we have been here before, either ourselves or by way of an ancestor.

Birthing Light in the Dark is a ministry. And as ministries go, it requires community and God's help. If you ask me, peppermints are a brilliant metaphor for this call. Why? Because peppermints remind me of my youth. Remembering them encourages me to lean in, to taste and see in new places. To move through life's journey with curiosity, and to lean into the mystery of our faith with intentionality and some playfulness or humor.

Remember your peppermints! Another fun thing about peppermints, depending on how you look at it, is that if you pull out a peppermint or any sweet treat while sitting in a pew, you may be asked to share it. Share your peppermints, friends! Share your stories -- of peace and love, grief and sorrow, too! We call this the sharing of the Good News! This is how we build and foster new relationships. This is how we bridge gaps across differences, seen and unseen, by sharing generously.

Now, I imagine that the peppermint candy may not be *your* treat of choice as we seek light in the dark. Perhaps, you are more into chewing gum or chocolate (which I enjoy, too!). Or maybe your peppermint takes place while you snuggle up next to the fire with your favorite book. Or maybe while watching *A Christmas Carol*, or *Home Alone* or even *Die Hard*. Maybe these are the peppermints that get you into the Spirit. Identify your peppermints, cherish them, and share them while you can!

My hope in sharing my relationship with peppermints will to spark something in your imaginations. With God's help, I believe that we can melt into our blessings, and we can savor our belovedness, even in dark times!

As we remember our peppermints, may we find some cheer! May we remember our neighbors, too! And don't forget, with each peppermint comes a responsibility. There is a call to take care of your wrappers responsibly. You ought not leave them behind frivolously. In this responsibility is a call to action, to compassion, and justice, in a time perhaps of fatigue and disorientation. As you remember your peppermints, please do not forget your wrappers!

The invitation is open! As believers, may we engage it faithfully, bringing our clouds of witnesses with us, those here in the earthly world as well as those who may have moved on. Witnesses such as Hagar, Elizabeth, Hannah, David, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. May this be an encouragement that we need in a time of uncertainty as we emerge into our next normal and into a new calendar year.

May we find moments to embrace the cool, refreshing sensations that a peppermint brings to one's taste buds as one inhales. May we hold onto the wonder, like the wonder of waking up on a white Christmas morning. May we hold onto the wonder of the gifts that await us under the tree, the gifts of community, fellowship, trust, and belonging!

May these sensations consume crisis, even if only for a moment, so that we may delight in the presence of God in the presents sent to us. Remembering to breathe deeply for as long as we have breath in our lungs. Refreshed as we discern and unwrap what God is calling us to in this moment.

I leave you with a poem called *The World Still Knows*:

*The night is still dark
and a procession of Herods still terrorize the earth,
killing the children to stay in power.
The world still knows its Herods,
but it also still knows those
who pack their dreams safely in their hearts
and set off toward Bethlehem,
faithful against all odds,
undeterred by fatigue or rejection,
to kneel to a child*

*And the world still knows those persons
wise enough
to follow a star,
those who do not consider themselves too intelligent
too powerful
too wealthy
to kneel to a child*

*And the world still knows those hearts so humble
that they're ready
to hear the word of a song
and to leave what they have, to go
to kneel to a child*

*The night is still dark,
but by the light of the star,*

*even today
we can still see
to kneel to a child*

May it be so, beloveds. Amen.