

## Christmas Eve, Year C

- I've come to realize that, while I deeply love reading theology, this is not in fact a trait that everyone shares – so in sermons, generally, I try not to quote too extensively from theologians
- But when I hear our Gospel passage today, it's basically impossible for me to keep from thinking about one of my all-time favorite theologians, Linus van Pelt
- If you're anything like me, and have a tradition of watching A Charlie Brown Christmas at some point during this season, then it's hard to even hear this Gospel passage and not imagine it being quoted by Linus, and in the King James Version, no less (Linus is something of a traditionalist, after all)
- In reply to Charlie Brown's impassioned pleas as to whether anyone knows what Christmas is all about, Linus says he can tell him, and then simply launches in:
- "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, 'Fear not: for behold, I bring unto you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'"
- And then he simply says, "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."
- I watch this at some point more or less every single Christmas, and it makes it seem so easy. This story, this birth story, is what Christmas is all about.
- But even as many times as I've seen it, there's something I didn't realize about the speech that Linus gives until it was pointed out to me, one key moment that I think says something very important, says even more deeply what Christmas is all about
- You see, after Linus, quoting Luke, says that the shepherds were 'sore afraid', he goes on that the Angel said unto them, 'Fear not'
- And at the moment he says these words, these two important words, he does something remarkable, something I've never seen Linus do anytime before – he drops his blanket
- Have you ever noticed that? At the moment the angel says 'fear not', Linus drops his security blanket, the comfort item for which he's known, that might as well be his calling

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- And I've thought about that a lot, really, Linus dropping his blanket at that exact moment – at the moment when the angel tells everyone afraid of what's coming not to fear
- Especially since, I think, we're all a little bit Linus
- We all have our own security blankets, don't we? We all have things that we cling to
- I guess I can't speak for you, but I know I do – concrete things like money or possessions, or the smartphone I seem to check obsessively at times, even when there's nothing at all going on – or abstract things like popularity, or competence, faith in myself and my own abilities, or even worse, my own sense of self-righteousness
- There are just so many things that I tend to cling to, for security – things that I think if I hold onto them tightly enough, that everything will turn out alright
- And yet, I think, Linus drops his blanket as an example to all of us
- It's fear, in a sense, that causes us to cling to some of these things – fear of loss, fear of vulnerability, fear of the unknown – but Linus wants us to realize that the angel is speaking to us, too
- “Fear not, for behold, I bring unto you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”
- The Good News is that we don't have to be afraid – the Good News is that we don't have to search for security in earthly things
- In fact what we really need, and the only thing we ever need to cling to, is something we've already been given – something we didn't ask for or even deserve, and something we never would have expected to find under our Christmas trees: the Incarnation of God
- The power of the Incarnation, of God made flesh and living among us, as one of us, is that we're shown that we don't need any of those earthly things, that they don't have the power to save us that we hope they would
- But because God noticed that we kept looking to earthly things for salvation, for assurance, for security, God realized that the only thing to be done was to physically come down to where we were looking
- If we seek salvation in the world, well then, God seemed to say, there's nothing for it but to make salvation present in the world, found in a manger some 2,000 years ago
- And once we realize that, that God is here among us, and that we can hold onto God instead of all those other things – that we can let all those other things go

- We can let go of the fear that paralyzes us, let go of all of our false hopes and the security blankets that won't really keep us safe, that don't really mean a thing in comparison – we are set free of all that baggage
- God loves us too much for us to cling to our fear, and to all the things we think will save us from it
- God tells us, through the angel, and then again through Luke the Evangelist, and then again through Linus the theologian, that God doesn't want us to have to bear that anymore
- It's because of that that God became flesh and now dwells among us
- That's what Christmas is all about