

Christmas Eve Sermon: Family Service 12/24/20

This evening is about shadows.

When we think about shadows, we generally think of something dark and sinister that is just lurking outside our sight. And what it does is fill us with fear. This year is one of fear, frustration, and feelings of unfillment...and we living in today's world think that shadows are not something we want...we think that it is fear frustration and unhappy feelings. We know the phrase, that a "person is afraid of their own shadow." And so, this means that someone is extremely nervous, anxiety ridden, and easily frightened. When people think and talk about death and dying we view it as someone being in "The valley of the shadow of death." But the Bible goes on to say that those who make the Lord their shepherd, who place their trust and faith in Him, that they no longer need to be afraid of this valley, or the shadow of death. It is merely a shadow, it carries no power. There's another shadow that I want to focus on tonight...the idea of being overshadowed by God and because of that we don't have to be afraid of shadows anymore. They hold no power.

Now, check this out: the same power that conceived Jesus, the Son of God, within the womb of Mary is the same power that works inside each and every believer in Jesus Christ. And the power I'm talking about is the overshadowing power and presence of the Holy Spirit. And that power is for our good. That power is God's power—immense power to fulfill meaning in our lives. When Mary questioned how she could be pregnant, the angel answered saying, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35 NIV)

At the first Christmas, Jesus Christ, the Word of God, the Light of the World, the Creator Himself was not conceived after the manner of men, but rather by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, whereby a virgin was able to conceive outside and beyond the laws of nature. It goes beyond that...Mary's womb was overshadowed, that is, the life conceived within her, Jesus Christ, was also protected and maintained by the Holy Spirit. It was seen in Jesus when He was a child. "The child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." (Luke 2:40) And when Jesus began His ministry we see this same overshadowing presence when John the Baptist baptized Him. "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him." (Matthew 3:16 NIV). It doesn't say that the Holy Spirit was a dove, but came down like a dove. It's as if the Holy Spirit descended and overshadowed Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, right after His baptism, it says, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert." (Luke 4:1 NIV)

We see the same idea of overshadowing in what Jesus said to His disciples about being empowered to do God's Kingdom plans and purposes. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NIV). It was that the Holy Spirit who descended upon the disciples in the upper room on the Feast of Pentecost filling them, overshadowing them, allowing them to do things beyond their own capability.

And now, tonight we live what Jesus said. He said that those who believe in Him will not only do the miraculous deeds that He Himself performed, but will do even greater things because He was going to the Father (Luke 14:12). We will do greater, why are we afraid. Take the bull by the horns, people. Caution is good, but don't let it paralyze you. Do God's work, worship Him, be in relationship with Him and others, tell His story, Invite people to do that too. Be cautious and do things in new ways. Tradition is great, but it is not the important thing. The important thing is God is with us—worship and follow Him.

We are not orphans, in John's Gospel, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:7 NIV)

The same overshadowing power and presence that conceived Jesus in the womb is the same overshadowing power and presence that's available to all who believe. So as David said, "Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall." (Psalm 55:22 NIV) and remember what Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28 NIV). The Holy Spirit's overshadowing presence brings Jesus's conception and birth into a person's life into their hearts, and when that happens then it is the overshadowing presence of the Holy Spirit that will lead and guide us.

This what it means to be overshadowed for Christmas. The overshadowing power and presence of the Holy Spirit is ours for the asking, and it is a gift that the Heavenly Father gives to His children. And seeing that it is Christmas let's ask our Heavenly Father for this great and wonderful gift. Listen to the promise Jesus gives. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13 NKJV). Ask God for the gift of the Holy Spirit again. He's already given to us the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, and He also desires to give to us the gift of the overshadowing power and presence of Holy Spirit as well. We no longer need to be afraid of the shadows, the Holy Spirit overshadows us, and God causes us to gave hold of the gifts in different ways and experience that new life, that birth of the babe in the manger, that God with us always. Amen.