

Rev. George Arceneaux

12/17/23

A Blue Christmas

In the name of the one God, creator, redeemer, and sustainer, mother, father, and parent,
Amen.

As I launch into this message, I want to thank you all, and especially our musicians and especially especially wanna Christa Creps who has made tonight and this space happen. And I'm thankful not just because of what has been offered so far and what we'll continue to live into in this worship space, but I'm thankful because this gives me opportunity to bring up something I have never brought up before in the pulpit. But given tonight is special and you all have shown up in vulnerability, I'm gonna do my best to do a meager bit of the same.

So, here it is. I am a HUGE fan of horror movies. I love scary movies. And I'm not just talking about the safe stuff, I'm not talking the Babadook or Get Out or the Exorcist, though those are awesome, I'm talking Basket Case, the Deadly Spawn, and I promise you this is a movie, Bloody Muscle Body Builder in Hell. I'm a fan of big budget down to movies that looked like they were film on the stick floor of a movie theatre, I love horror. That said, I hope you can imagine why I as a priest haven't brought this up in a public worship service before.

So why now?

There's a message I listen to every year from a fella named Joe Bob Briggs. He hosts scary movie marathons on tv in the same vein as Rob Serling from the Twilight Zone or Svenhoolie here in Chicago. And the message he delivered that I always go back to was on that idea of there being no room in the inn for Mary and Joseph, and yet the inn wasn't where the important stuff happened on that first

Christmas. What mattered didn't happen in the safe, warm, comfortable, tidy inn. But rather in the barn with stinky shepherds and hairy animals and weird wise folks and the angels and a new born baby to tired, but loving parents. And the point I hope to make is that those things that you bring that may not fit in the cozy, tidy, neat and joyful idea of Christmas, well those things are what make tonight special.

Amongst many other things, the Christmas story is about a pregnant family looking for a place to celebrate this coming life in a world that was as infuriating and hard as our world can be. I mean, think about what this family is dealing with. Mary and Joseph have a donkey they can travel on, but they're hoofing it on foot from Nazareth to Bethlehem. And do you know how long a distance that was?.... 97 MILES! And this wasn't the interstate, these are dirt roads, and Mary is 9 months pregnant. And why are they making this trip? Not to visit family, or do anything special, but because some bureaucrat named Quirinius says everybody needs to be registered in their home town, so they're just travelling this whole way for some jerk in Jerusalem. And after days and days of travelling, covered in sweat and dirt they show up at the only inn in town. And they look tired, and Mary looks like she's about to deliver, and Joseph is desperate and the inn keeper so, oops, sorry, no vacancy.

Bull honkey! I don't care what inn you're going to, if there's a pregnant woman on your door step that wants to pay money for a room, you FIND one. Bethlehem was hardly the epicenter of economic and cultural activity, it was a podunk town ten miles outside of Jerusalem, you're telling me that inn was full up? Heck, it may not have been convenient, it may not have been easy for that Innkeeper to let Mary and Joseph in, but he could have. Instead, he took one look and said these people are more trouble than they're worth. And I can't help but imagine some of you might have heard that same message said about yourself at some point. That message of no room at the inn is still here today. Those places that say, "oh we're happy, we're joyful, we don't want to know about what it's like dealing with terminal illness, we don't want to know you if you're addicted to something, we don't want to hear

how you miss your husband who's passed away or ask about how you're doing after a divorce or your child that died, we're supposed to be happy right now because that's what Christmas is all about."

But I'll tell you what. That's not where God shows up. That's not where Mary had that baby. The best Christmases, heck, the best moments of our lives that matter the most aren't the ones where everything was perfect or nice. It's those moments where someone looked at us and all our problems, all our hurt, all our pain, all the reasons we might think we're not worth knowing or loving and said, hey, can I come into that manger with you, because I want to be part of whatever's happening in there.

God didn't become that infant in a manger for the powerful, or the rich, or the sexy. God joined our world to be with the miscreants and lowly, the people who no matter their circumstances, be they day farmers working with sheep or wise kings bearing gold and frankincense and myrrh from far away, God wanted to be with people who knew that love matters more than anything.

So friends, I'm bringing my horror movies to this Blue Christmas, and bring my fear that I'll be judged as some no-good clergy for thinking I can preach about message that comes right before a movie about killer ice cream man. Which, by the way, if you're alright with some campy gross-out stuff, Clint Howard's Ice Cream Man is pretty fun. But this Blue Christmas, remember that whatever you bring, it's welcome. That table right there, it's set for you, whoever you are, no matter your background or your story. Thanks for coming. Thanks for bringing all of yourself to this Christmas with us and those tired thankful parents caring for a new baby in a manger. Amen.