

SERMON DELIVERED ON CHRISTMAS DAY, 25 DECEMBER, 2014
AT HOLY GHOST ANGLICAN CHURCH, GENOA, BY FR. PETE
WRIGHT

A child was born this day 2000 years ago. The town was Bethlehem. There was no hospital. Sorry...no room in the bed and breakfast where travelers might spend the night. A man said, "Uh...there's a kind of a stable over there. Let's bring our stuff inside. We'll stay there. At least it offers some shelter. Not a lot of privacy, but some shelter. There is no time to wait any longer. You're about to have that baby."

What an extraordinary day. What an extraordinary event. The savior of the world was born. The Messiah that all those prophets talked about. He finally came.

To me it is rather thrilling that this Jesus I know fulfilled some 324 ancient prophecies found in the Hebrew Scriptures. This gives me a great feeling about this person I worship. Amazing too...because if someone asked you to give 324 characteristics about the king or queen of England or the president of Italy even a hundred years from now, you couldn't do it. If someone asked you to give just 8 major characteristics of the monarch or the president, you still could not do it.

A number of years ago a professor of math and astronomy, Dr. Peter Stoner, did an extensive probability analysis of the prophecies about Jesus. He concluded that if you took just 8 of those major prophecies, there was only a 1 in 10^{17} chance that you could predict accurately. If 1 in 10 to the 17th power is hard to imagine, he made it simple. He used the state of Texas in the U.S. as an example. Now Texas has 696,000 square kilometers. In comparison, Italy has 301,000 square kilometers. So Texas is more than twice the size of Italy. And he said that if you took a bunch of silver dollars [demonstrate size] and laid them all over the state of Texas so they would cover all of the state 61 centimeters deep, and you marked one silver dollar, dropped it from an airplane, then stirred all the silver dollars in the state of Texas, then you blindfolded a person and you told him or her she can travel anywhere in that state and pick up one silver dollar. The chance of that person picking the marked silver dollar would be about 1 in 10 to the 17th power.

Imagine the math calculation if you were to use 324 prophecies.

Does it really take math to come to salvation through Jesus Christ? No. It takes faith. Math isn't going to get the job done, although it kinda makes you

feel good about this wondrous book called the Bible...and also who this Jesus really is.

When someone tries to tell you that Christianity is a religious faith based upon myth or ignorant acceptance of certain precepts that have no basis in fact, they are sadly mistaken. I say that because there was a news article that went around the Internet in September. "Jesus never existed," it said. Over the next few weeks, the ignorance of the author was roundly condemned by learned scholars, including many who were Jewish. Secular history shows Jesus really existed. His existence led to what we celebrate and remember today. The voice of angels. Mary. Joseph. A not so nice place for a baby to be born. All those many promises made through the prophets coming true. The significance of what is both seen -- and what is unseen -- coming crashing into our lives.

We share in the promises made to the children of Israel and to the entire world through the Prophets. It is God's promise of a new day. It is God's promise of a new life. It is God's promise of a new world that can happen if we will take seriously our calling as witnesses to everything that Jesus is.

I lived through nearly all of WWII. When I was young, there was a story I heard...about some American soldiers in Germany. The Christmas cease fire was agreed upon between all the nations involved in that war. When the flare went up, both sides stopped shooting. The exhausted soldiers could get some much needed sleep in their foxholes.

An American soldier by the name of Walter Henry recalls that as he lay in his foxhole, he heard from a short distance across the battlefield, "stille nacht...heilige nacht." After the German soldiers sang the first stanza of Silent Night in German, the Americans responded with the second verse in English. And so the evening went. Each side alternating carols of love and peace in their own language. That peace was there on both sides because of one person, Jesus Christ.

This is Christmas. Christmas is a chapter in the story of God giving himself to us...touching us, if you will. When the Spirit of God's Son lives in our heart, we begin to walk in the paths of peace. That is the first step to wisdom -- finally discovering the Christ within us, the Spirit of giving yourself in love as God did on that first Christmas.

On this day, Jesus comes to liberate us from our selfishness, from those habits of childhood, where I need to be the center of all that happens and where I want others to wait on me and care for me, the most important

person in my world. Jesus comes to liberate us from that selfishness that enslaves us to our own whims and appetites and egos.

You all have that gift of faith. I don't believe you would be here today if you did not.

The story of the virgin birth is not just about the past, an event lost in history. But it is the story of Christ being born within us through the union of the Spirit of God using us. That's an awesome thought. That should make you feel REALLY good deep within your soul this Christmas day.