

**Be Born In Us Today**  
**A Series of Special Services for Advent**

## **Be Born In Us Today Bringing Blessing**

**[Now the Lord said to Abram:] “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”**

**Genesis 12:2**

Imagine that two friends of yours are attending a Browns Game at First Energy Stadium. The game is televised, and you have the game on at home. You know your friends are there in person, and wonder if by chance you might spot them somewhere near the fifty yard line in the crowd of 68,000. What are the odds? Then suddenly there they are! A camera pans across the crowd and settles on them long enough that you recognize them. It is an amazing moment. You shout out their names at the TV as if they can hear you. What are the odds? So many people, yet they show just two!

It's easy to get lost in a crowd. Do you remember the old *Where's Waldo?* books? The idea of *Where's Waldo?* is to find the one among the many. It can be hard to spot him.

Throughout human history, the Bible tells us that God is more than pretty good at finding someone in a crowd. Four thousand years ago God found a tribal chief named Abram, and God picked him out from among all the nations and people groups on earth. God singled this leader out of the crowd and promised to bless him. This blessing, God said, would extend from Abram outward to all nations. That's what God said, and that's exactly what happened. God chose the one out of the many, blessed the one, and brought that blessing from the one to the many.

For us Christians, Abraham's impact goes much farther than that of an historical or religious figure. We believe that God blessed Abraham to establish the nation Israel and that from that nation God blessed the world with the Messiah, Jesus Christ. We believe that when God first blessed Abraham, God already had blessing

the whole world in mind. You can't miss this in the promise God gives Abraham. Pay attention to these words. God very personally blessed Abraham. And at the same time, it is all very universal, the blessing will be for every person of all time. The one and the many. God said, ***“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing ... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”*** *Genesis 12:2-3.*

In our lives in 2022, we live among the many. We are defined by the communities we cherish, the relationships we hold dear, the culture that shapes us.

For example, I think of myself more as being from Amherst, than I do as being from Cleveland. I know more people in this smaller area. It's all familiar, and feels like home. Even smaller is my neighborhood, my relationships here, with you, the people of St. Paul Lutheran Church. Even more personal, I am husband to my first wife, Sue; dad to 3 who are now adults, father-in-law to 2, and Papa to 3 little granddaughters. My heart is pulled to the personal, one-on-one, close relationships.

Yet, metro-Cleveland is the area where I shop, and see doctors, and go to eat out, or watch a game. Cleveland is 370,000 people. I couldn't imagine living in New York City with 8 million people, or Shanghai where there are 22 million.

More and more, we think globally. We care what happens on the other side of the world. We buy things on the internet from people in countries around the world. In so many ways we can lose ourselves in the masses.

Almost a century ago already, Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* was prophetic in recognizing how the one can get lost in the many. Wilder has one of his characters, Rebecca, recall a letter her friend Jane had received. The letter was addressed to “Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe;

the Mind of God.” You can picture Jane Crofut in that address becoming smaller and smaller, less and less significant.

This can be a blessing, this strong sense of the many, especially when it leads us, as in the case of the letter in *Our Town*, back to the One who has created it all. God is the author of all of this community and culture of which we are a part. From the individual we move to the universe and ultimately to the Creator God.

The challenge, though, is not to lose oneself along the way. The challenge is to know that as God is busy working the divine plan to save the world through Jesus Christ, God has not lost sight of you -- yes, you -- in the global crowd.

**“God so loved the world”** says that familiar Bible passage once spoken by Jesus. It is true. God loves every last person – every single one of the 8 billion plus on the planet. It is absolutely true that **“God so loved the world.”** But just as true is: **“God so loved YOU.”** And that is the bigger challenge these days – it’s a bigger challenge that God gets ahold of the individual, the single person’s heart. God has some work to do, cutting through all that stuff of families, nations and cultures—to get ahold of me, to have His love and forgiveness and hope rest personally in your heart, and my heart.

When I was a teenager and I worked for several weeks at a Christian Summer Camp, I remember one of Camp Counselors had a T-Shirt with a saying on it that grabbed me. I still remember it. The T-Shirt had the words across the front, “I’m a Who-so-ever.” The back of the T-shirt had written on it the old King James version: **“God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that WHO-SO-EVER believeth in Him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”** *John 3:16 KJV*

It is, truly, a beautiful thing to know and trust that God so loved the world. It is another thing altogether, more beautiful, and much more personal to say, “That who-so-ever – that’s ME! I’M a whosoever!”

God gets His divine mail delivered to Jane and to you. He is a God who cuts through the masses, and the culture, and the crowd, and He brings His word of love and forgiveness to YOU. Addressed to YOU personally. He does this through His Words of promise in the Bible. He does come to you personally when the water of forgiveness was poured just on you in your Baptism, where He put His personal name – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – God put His name on *you* to make *you* His child. God comes to you personally with bread and wine that touches your lips, that is tasted by your tongue, and He declares, this is Jesus, His Body and His Blood given personally to you to forgive your sins.

Out of the many, God's love and blessing reaches the one. And God's blessing on the one, spreads, like ripples when a stone is thrown into a pond. The ripples spread outward and outward as God's blessing reaches the many.

That is the message of the call of Abraham. Yes, God is out to save the many. God even wants ALL. God does it, however, one by one, family by family, nation by nation. And when God gets through, when the saving work of Jesus Christ takes hold of an individual, that individual reaches out to other saved individuals, and a community is born. This new community is the family of God, the local Christian congregation. This local church is where we of course, with God, with the church, and with the neighbor, we come together, and together we are individually receivers of God's grace and hope. This is where small ripples closest to the splash appear. You, as one, are personally loved by Jesus, and from you God loves the family, the neighbor, the church family, the city, the county, the state, the country, the world. In other words, from the many God finds the one who in turn blesses the many. That is your story of blessing. It's my story too.



A favorite painting of many at Christmas is Flemish Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel's *The Census of Bethlehem*, painted in 1566. Bruegel places the story of Christmas Eve in his own contemporary setting of a taxing census in a bustling peasant village in the Low Countries of the Netherlands. If Bruegel lived today, he would paint the people wearing blue jeans and t-shirts, holding iPhones. There is enough to see in the painting to fill half an hour. He painted into the scene ice skaters, snowball fights, kids sledding across the ice, the draining of a slaughtered pig's blood for sausage, a makeshift pub, a crumbling castle, a well-kept church, and a long line of taxpayers. You have to look for her, but there in the foreground, among the bustling crowd of a Christmas Eve in the 1560's Holland, is Mary.

Mary is shown obviously expecting the birth of our Lord. She rides a donkey led by Joseph into Bethlehem. A cow beside her looks to us, the viewers, as if to say, "Please, take note. Here He is. He has arrived." The one among many, blessed to bless many! Mary is blessed to be the mother of our Savior, Jesus, and this baby will grow to give His life to save all people, of all time.



Martin Luther captured this truth, when in a sermon for Christmas Day, Luther said,

**“The Gospel does not merely teach about the history of Christ. No, it enables all who believe it to receive it as their own, which is the way the Gospel operates. Of what benefit would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times, and it would daily be sung into my ears in a most lovely manner, if I were never to hear that he was born for me and was to be my very own?”** (“Sermon for Christmas Day; Luke 2:1-14,” *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, Lutherans in All Lands Press, 1906).

Much of this season building up towards Christmas will be spent doing what we do at Christmas with the people we love the most. The season of lights and carols and greens and cookies and gifts will in many ways bring its own blessings to our lives and, yes, to our culture. It will be a lovelier time when the world takes on a yuletide glow, and the message of peace on earth, goodwill toward all seems more than just a slogan. We will do it all with millions and millions of Christians across the world, and that will be good.

That said, the good news of Christmas is also meant to be ours, one by one. Yours. Personally. God has always had a heart for the one. From one many will be blessed. This is the way God works. This is the way God worked in Abraham’s life. This is the way God worked in Mary’s life. It is the same pattern with Jesus of Nazareth. And God works the same way in you.

Christ was born for us. Christ was born for you. This Christmas may God find and bless you among the many and make you a blessing.

The last stanza of Phillips Brooks’ carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem” closes with a prayer. May it be our prayer – each one of us and all of us:

O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin and enter in,  
be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us,  
abide with us,  
our Lord Immanuel!

Amen.