

## Christmas Eve Message 2013

*"Why Have are you Here?"*

Well friends, it is a glorious night tonight is it not? Here we are, an intimate gathering of about 150 people... all together with our family and friends and church community.

There's snow on the ground outside and there's candlelight and music inside. The church is all decorated, we've shared our thoughts on love, and peace and joy and hope, and we've read the Christmas story about Mary and Joseph, and the Angels and the Shepherds – all that's left is to sing some carols, take up the offering, have the minister bless us, and we'll have successfully celebrated another Christmas Eve in a glorious fashion.

But friends – God wants to interrupt our glorious celebration this evening.

So I'm going to read a scripture passage for you about someone who usually has nothing to do with a Christmas Eve celebration – the prophet Elijah.

And the scripture passage I'm going to read is about the time Elijah ran off to the Mountain of the Lord – Mt. Horeb, also known at Mt. Siani where Moses received the Ten Commandments.

So – from 1 Kings 11: 11-13

*<sup>11</sup> The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."*

*Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup> After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. <sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

*Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

Friends – tonight that voice is for us as well, that gentle whisper interrupts our glorious celebration and says to us *“What are you doing here friends? Why have you come?”*

It’s not a rude interruption – after all its God who speaks, and he always has the right as God to speak whenever He wants... and He doesn’t yell at us, whispers to us... subtly, gently *“what are you doing here?”*

And the tone is not interrogating or condemning... it’s searching... it’s reflective.. it’s inviting... *“what are you doing here?”*

Maybe you have come because somehow you know there is more to the holiday than the great and powerful winds of consumerism which seek to shatter sales records each season...

Maybe you have come to seek something comforting and reassuring in the face of all the natural disaster we’ve seen

happen in past year – like earthquakes, floods, tornados, typhoons, ice-storms...

Maybe you have come because of the fires of controversy that surround and intensify each year about whether we say Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays or whatnot, and whether we can have nativity scenes or Christmas trees in public places... and this is what you do to keep Christ in Christmas...

Maybe you’re here because of tradition, family, friends – or just curiosity.... or maybe it’s a mix of a number of these things.

Whatever it might be friends God interrupts us and speaks to us tonight to draw these motives to the surface of our consciousness, to bring them out in front so we pay attention to them - so that we come to the realization that these motives have been placed there by God himself.

God wants you to realize that He has been working through your reasons for being here tonight to draw you to this place,

to this point... so that He can reveal Himself to you, so that you can have an encounter with Him.

Now when Elijah heard God whisper to him – he pulled his cloak over his face and went to stand in God’s presence... because friends God in his essence, in his glory is so powerful that we cannot face him directly or we would perish...

But ironically – unless we encounter God, we will also perish...

So tonight friends, instead of us pulling our coats over our faces to hide from God’s glory – He has left his glory behind to encounter us - as one of us.

So that you will meet Him in a gentle whisper... not on a mountainside, behind a veil like Elijah, but in stable where a new mother is whispering softly to calm the cries of a newborn baby –

Friends – it is here that we meet God himself, born as Jesus the Messiah.

And in that encounter with God in the flesh friends; all our reasons for being here tonight, well they are insignificant in comparison and they fall away... after all they were only meant to bring us to this place where we are encountering God!

And what about what we’ve been doing here so far... and what we have yet to do in our celebration?

Well friends, they become our means of responding to our encounter with God.

Once God has revealed himself to us, we’re not just singing carols... we’re worshipping God, we’re worshipping Jesus Christ

So that whisper “*why are you here?*” which has interrupted us – now transforms our celebration into a time of worship where we can shout back with joy - “we are here to worship! We are here to worship you Lord Jesus!”

So, friends - as we continue on with tonight's program we're not just going to simply sing some carols and take up an offering and be on our way... we're going to respond in worship, and we'll go from here tonight having encountered God!

Friends "why are you here?"