



THE GREAT
RESCUE

**CHRISTMAS EVE
AT FIRST PRES**

Saturday, December 24, 2022

1, 3, 5, 7:30 p.m.

Candlelight Services



FIRST PRES
COLORADO SPRINGS

What would you do to rescue a loved one? I was thinking about when my family moved from Charlottesville to Atlanta in December 2010. We got up at four in the morning, loaded the kids into the already stuffed minivan and truck, with a trailer behind and all that. The cat was in the car. “Be sure not to let the cat out!” I opened the sliding side door of the minivan to throw my coat in. Rawrr! Out went the cat. We spent the next 45 minutes, in the dark, in the cold, trying to wrangle up that cat. I admit, it was on the tip of my tongue. I was just about to say, “You know, guys, maybe Charlotte just prefers Virginia.” Just then the cat was rescued. Ellie had her in her arms. Saved. The things we do! But that’s a cat.

What would you do to rescue the person next to you? The holidays opened up in our city with the horror of a mass shooting at a nightclub. Two veterans jumped forward risking their own lives to save others. The Colorado Springs Police Department was there in three minutes! Rushing in. Or what would you do to rescue a child? Have you heard the rescue story of the 12 boys and their coach in Thailand a few years ago? A movie came out this year. The soccer team went into Tham Luang cave not knowing the rains were coming. They were trapped 2.5 miles in as all the narrow passages filled with water. What would you do to rescue a team of boys you didn’t even know?

Sometimes we think we have to rescue Christmas. Who’s going to save Christmas? Elf, Kevin, the Griswolds, they’re all saving Christmas. Even Charlie Brown. Let me tell you, if there is anything so helpless that only Charlie Brown can save it, maybe we should

just let it go! That Christmas seems very delicate, like a soap bubble. Keep it floating or it will pop. Whatever that is, it’s not Christmas. That’s not the birth of Jesus Christ. We are talking here about nothing other than a great invasion of this world by the God who created it. That’s no soap bubble. This is a rescue plan. This is a military incursion, an invasion. This is without a doubt the most powerful event, the most powerful rescue in history since the world itself was created. We don’t need to save Christmas. We need to be saved by it.

Those Thai boys sat in utter darkness. It’s hard to imagine dark so dark. What happens to you sitting in total, pitch-black dark for nine days? What happens to your eyes, your mind, your sense of balance? Do you even know where you are anymore? Then a diver pops up with a flashlight on his head. “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:2). Light in darkness. What about spiritual darkness? What happens when you sit there for so long in the dark, so hungry you don’t even know to call it hunger anymore, so thirsty you forget what it’s like to drink. “You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder” (Isaiah 9:3). Harvest? Food? We get so spiritually hungry we don’t even know what to call this void, this emptiness, this hunger. But God promises joy at the harvest. Fullness.

The shepherds were watching their flocks by night, and darkness and cold was over the land, when from heaven there came a great light. “An angel of

the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified” (Luke 2:9). The light shines in the darkness. The light shines down from heaven, it comes down. It’s not a light coming up from our land. It’s not a light emerging from the inherent goodness of mankind, it’s not a light glowing from the sentimentality of Christmas cheer or the perfect, happy family gathering...it’s not that light. If our greatest hope in life is to cobble together one, happy, sentimental family Christmas, we are in trouble! The light comes down from heaven and it shines on something. Something new. Something invasive and disruptive. Something to change everything: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). The Birth. Light penetrating darkness.

Experts gathered around the mouth of that cave in Thailand where those boys were stuck and lost, and they struggled to come up with a plan. The challenges were monumental. For days they thought there was no way. Some were willing to take a life-sized risk, to risk their lives to squeeze through the dark water caves in scuba gear—to rescue. When I say Christmas is a Great Rescue, I mean this is God’s plan. God’s plan for the world; God’s plan for you. God has a way. It means Jesus taking His place in the womb of Mary, stepping down out of heaven and being born to us. “How can it be,” said the church father, Augustine, “How can it be, that the Word of God, by whom the world is governed, by whom all things both were and are created, should

contract himself into the womb of a virgin; should leave the angels, and be shut up in one woman’s womb?” This is Christmas. This is no delicate myth, no fleeting sentiment, this is God at work! Christmas is not a “holiday.” Christmas is not a vacation. Christmas is a rescue mission. God has come down to us to rescue.

That’s what Isaiah saw 700 years before it happened. “Isaiah ‘twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind: with Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind. To show God’s love aright, she bore to men a Savior, when half-gone was the night.” Isaiah ‘twas foretold it. This plan was in God’s heart. The Spirit shared it hundreds of years before it happened and Isaiah could see it in his mind’s eye. God has a plan to save. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (Isaiah 1:18). “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit” (Isaiah 11:1). “In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation’” (Isaiah 25:9). “See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart” (Isaiah 40:10-11). God has a plan. A plan for our salvation. A Great Rescue. That’s what Isaiah saw.

Seven hundred years later the shepherds hit their knees scared to death by this light from heaven in the middle of the dark night, and they heard

this: “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord’ (Luke 2:10-11). Have you heard it too many times to have it register anymore? This is the answer to your thirst. This is the food for your hunger. This is the light for your darkness. Unto you. Unto you is born this day a Savior, Christ the Lord.

The divers went into that cave to rescue boys whose names they hardly knew. Jesus came down to us. One of those divers, a Thai Navy Seal, got caught up in the tight tunnels of the cave. His oxygen ran out. One life to rescue many. Jesus grew up, taught, healed, and then was arrested and crucified. He died. But His death was not an accident. Jesus was born with a purpose. Jesus is the only child ever born whose purpose was there from day one; the meaning of His life was established before His first breath. He came to give His life to save. “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5-6). From His earliest thought, our Lord knew, He came into the world for one reason: to provide salvation. To rescue. His very name is “Jesus,” which means “God saves,” for He saves the people from their sins.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this” (Isaiah 9:6-7). God will do it. The zeal of the Lord will accomplish it. God will rescue. There was only one way to get those boys out of that cave, to rescue them from certain death. Did you see this? They sedated the boys, taped scuba gear to their face, held them close to the divers’ body, dead to the world, and pulled them through two miles of water and darkness. They were zealous to save.

What do we need to do tonight? How do we save Christmas? How do you know the great rescue plan of God. Trust in him. Trust in Christ. Lay yourself out before the Lord and put your whole trust in him. Let him carry you close to his heart. Believe that Jesus has come. Believe that he has died for you. Believe that he emerged from the cave of death and that tied to his zealous, strong, unrelenting arms—you will find life too. I wonder if you want to pray with me: *“Jesus, You are the light of the world; Bring Your light into my darkness. You are the Savior. Save me. You are the Rescuer. Rescue me. Let this Christmas Day be the day, that I am Yours forever.”*