



# St. Michael's Church

CHARLESTON, SC

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2019

DEEPEST ENGAGEMENT

ISAIAH: 7:10-17  
MATTHEW 1:18-25

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

HELP US LORD TO BE SO CONNECTED TO YOU THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE  
SERVANTS OF OTHERS.

TAKE OUR LIPS AND SPEAK THROUGH THEM,  
OUR MINDS AND THINK THROUGH THEM,  
AND TAKE OUR HEARTS, AND SET THEM ON FIRE.

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This is the magic of Christmas Eve!

There is simply no other night of the year like It!

It's:

- Mysterious
- Marvelous
- Powerful
- Romantic
- Ethereal

Christmas Eve grabs our hearts and invites us to something beyond ourselves...

Which produces in us a hunger to share all of this with another!

Could it be that this is why more men and women get engaged on Christmas than any other time of year?

My Favorite Christmas engagement story is from a guy who rents a helicopter.

He and his soon to be fiancé' fly over their city, and then over his house—where earlier in the day in the snow

he had shoveled out the words:

- WILL
- YOU
- MARRY
- ME!

Complete with candles  
and rose petals.

Can you imagine as the woman flying over such a scene and saying no?

If by the way you plan on getting engaged tonight,

I can't get you snow or a helicopter,

but I might be able to get you to the top of our steeple!

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Tonight, Christmas Eve is essentially the story of deepest engagement...

Yes, it begins with the engagement of Mary and Joseph.

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But most powerfully and important for us,

The story quickly shifts into God's plan for engaging us!

Christmas Eve is the night God comes down to earth

to engage humanity

through his Son Jesus Christ.

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You see, for 400 years, ancient Israel--the whole world--was waiting to be rescued by God.

- All the Prophets had predicted the rescue
- The people were waiting...
- They had sung the Messiah a hundred times..

Finally...on this night,  
God finally acts by engaging humanity by HIMSELF

becoming flesh in the form of Jesus Christ.

God leaves His throne in heaven to become flesh and come into the hearts of you and me-

- the Lord of the Universe
- in human scale...
- a King in disguise

John 1:  
God became flesh  
and dwelt among us...

Engaging us...  
for 4 reasons:

To:

- Be in relationship with us
- To Remove our sin within...
- To love and protect us
- And To one day bring us to heaven!

I don't know how this makes you feel,  
But I pray it makes you feel more loved than you could ever imagine!

It is the love story of all love stories...

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Now, I hate to tell this next story because everytime I tell it I cry...

The story of a journalist

who recalls the day he and his wife were listening to Disney songs with their two little girls.

“When the sentimental love song:

“I See the Light” from Tangled came on,

- I walked over to my wife,
- And take her in my arms
- And we began dancing slowly together..

As we danced, and as the song approached its final chorus,

I suddenly realized our daughters were just staring at us,

staring at us in complete silence.

At the end of the song I gave it a Hollywood ending.

I took my wife’s face in my hands and kissed her.

After I pulled away, I looked over and saw my oldest daughter’s eyes fill with tears...

Then she came over and buried her face in my wife’s legs-

- And cried.

My wife asked her why she was crying...

My daughter just shook her head.....

So I probed and asked my daughter:

Give me one word to describe how you’re feeling right now...

My daughter looked at me and in a word I will never forget.... she said:

(pause)

LOVED.

I FEEL LOVED.

This I Pray is what you’re feeling right now!

God becoming flesh tonight, engaging you....

- In a love relationship
- To remove our sin and guilt within...
- to love & protect us
- to one day bring us to heaven!

It is So personal.

God became flesh  
to live in here!

Can you picture this?

- Have we been church people so long we've forgotten the power of HIS Engagement and love-and what he's doing for us tonight?  
Or maybe you're here tonight searching...
- You've thought that  
Christianity is just a bunch of rules with feel good events twice a year?

No, out of Love, it's God becoming man to reach every single one of us...

God, coming down from heaven taking on the name Jesus.

The love story of love stories.

A love story that requires a response from us.

Revelation 3:

Jesus, God in human flesh says:

I stand at the door and knock,

he who hears My voice and opens the door,

I will live in them and they with me.

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I remember my marriage engagement so well.

It was August 1994,

Elizabeth and I were in Scotland and when we arrived at Ellen Donan Castle near the Isle of Sky

I knelt down, and through a Robbie Burns poem...said:

Your Love is like a red red rose newly sprung in June...

Then I asked her to marry me...

I knelt and knocked on the door of her heart.

BUT I couldn't KNEEL AND stay in that place forever,

it was Scottish windy and wet,

I needed a response!

That's where we are on Christmas Eve!

Jesus knocking at the door of our heart...a Love story really needing our response!

When my wife said yes, it began a whole new ultra-exclusive season that continues as we head into our 25<sup>th</sup> year!

- Our yes to God tonight
  - Our yes again tonight
  - means so many wonderful things!
- It means we can live forgiven and free!
  - Our sins and regrets taken away!
- A yes means no matter if we're currently
  - married,
  - single,
  - widowed,
  - with or without children,
  - Jesus will always be there..loving and protecting us.
- A yes also means you don't have to worry about your future beyond this life!

This engagement means we will live with Jesus forever!

Last week and within 9 days of each other:

- My 84 year old mother was diagnosed with cancer..
- days after that,
- my 88 year old father,
  - after he preached in his church last Sunday passed out and had to be taken out on a stretcher..

They both have no fear of death because of their engagement of Jesus.

I talked to my dad on Monday who from his hospital bed said:

“Al, they haven’t given me a diagnosis yet, but you need to know:

I HAVE NO FEAR OF DEATH...I know where I’m going!”

Saying yes to Jesus brings us that assurance!  
But there is another profound reason to say yes tonight..

...and it’s this..

Parishioner Pat McKinney helped me see this..

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The question of whether or not we receive Jesus into our hearts will determine the kind of retirement we have.

Let me explain:

- If we engage Jesus in our heart
- and if we raise our children by inviting them to engage Jesus in their heart...
- prayerfully, they will live the Life Jesus was born to give them..
- They will have and understand forgiveness
- They will know the love of their eternal father
- They will know this life is only the pre-lude for heaven!

With Jesus in the hearts of our children,  
prayerfully they will make Jesus led decisions...

Which means, our retirement won't be spent bailing them out:

time after time after time-

from bad decisions!

Now, I know life is messier than this,

but if our children are raised in that engaged relationship with Jesus,

Even though they stumble along the way..

They will come back to Him!

Franklin Graham, the prodigal son of Billy Graham is the perfect example of one who  
"Came back" from rebellion.

But Choosing to raise our children without Jesus

will mean our retirement will look different.

But remember this as well..

They will be taking care of us one day

and so we want them engaged with Jesus now!

But most of all, don't we want to be in heaven WITH OUR CHILDREN?

Therefore,

Jesus tonight desires one thing from you,

- Your heart ENGAGED IN HIM..
- The hearts of your children
- and their children..
  - To be in relationship with Him
  - To forgive sin
  - to love and protect



- to one day bring us to heaven!

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Yet, Jesus loves us so much He allows us to say no...

Where we live a life of:

- unforgiveness
- lost love
- and no earthly idea where we go upon our death..

What does this look like?

A priest friend of mine said:  
For him, "it looked horrible."

He told me that growing up and before he met Christ, he hated Christmas...

He said:

"I would hide behind our CHRISTMAS tree because my mom and dad would drink so much and then start to fight and I was so scared."

There was no Jesus in our Christmas,

"it was  
nothing more than a bad party."

pause

Let me tell you about a man who said yes..

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He's been called the most original American novelist of crime and suspense in our time.

His name is Andrew Klaven...

Like my father Andrew grew up culturally Jewish in New York.

- His mother an atheist
- His father an agnostic.

Andrew had his Bar Mitzvah, but neither he nor his parents believed in any of it.

But one Christmas Eve began an engaged relationship...

He was 14.

His parents had him stay at the home of their Christian nanny.

Klaven recalling that night writes:

“The Christmas celebration swept me away with its:

- beauty
- the music
- the whole thing
- even the cooking.

At the end of the night, I was put to bed.

I looked up and there on the wall was this picture of Jesus.

A very sentimental Jesus staring off into space with a halo over his head.

I remember thinking at the time:

- That’s the creepiest thing I have ever seen!
- I was scared out of my wits by it!
- I thought, that picture is going to keep me up all night..

Well it didn’t.

The next morning I opened my eyes,

that same picture of Jesus had been transformed.

The morning light struck the picture and transformed it into a picture of a kind of guardian:

- Friendly
- Benevolent
- Loving, as if He were saying...
  - you thought I was scary, but here I am taking care of you all night long...

Christ that Christmas Eve was beckoning me...

but it wouldn't be until 35 years later...

I was 49, lying on another bed reading a novel by Patrick O'Brian...

One of the characters whom I admired in the book said a prayer before going to sleep.

I thought to myself,

“Well, if he can pray, so can I.”

I laid the book aside and whispered just a 3 word prayer:

I simply prayed:

Thank you GOD.

The next day I woke up and everything had changed!

- There was a sudden clarity and brightness to familiar faces!
- They were alive with meaning and with my own delight in them!
- I call this experience the Joy of my joy!
- I began to pray every day and over time, this joy of my joy became a constant companion:
- A steady sense of vitality and beauty that endured even in periods of sorrow and pain.

Later that week I asked God:

“How can I thank you for what you have done for me?

What could I possibly offer you in return?”

As clearly as any voice I've ever heard, he said:

“Get baptized.”

I was stunned, me?

After all, I was:

- Jewish!

- A realist who believed in science and reason!
  - A worldly man who loved
    - violent movies
    - politics
    - and a good single malt scotch!
- But I realized that the voice that had spoken into my heart

knew me better than I knew myself.

I knew I had to be baptized.

“The moment I rose from my knees by the baptismal font,

I knew I had stepped through some invisible barrier between myself and a remarkable new journey.

A new joy and easiness.

My soul had found its home.

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Andrew Klaven’s heart was

- warmed

that first Christmas Eve, and

- transformed

all those years later.

My friends, This is the true magic of Christmas Eve.

- Mysterious because God became one of us!
- Marvelous because He loves us so
- Powerful because we are forgiven and heaven bound
- Romantic because it is an eternal love story
- Ethereal because it’s supernatural!

If you've been a Christian all your life, say yes again to Jesus, knocking at the door of your heart..

If you've never said yes, if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian,

it's okay, tonight is the night of nights to say for the first time...I DESIRE DEEPEST ENGAGEMENT WITH YOU JESUS.

I receive you Lord:

Let us pray.

And I want you to pray this prayer with me...(out loud?)

God in Flesh Jesus, I welcome you into my heart..

- Thank you God...
- Forgive me of all my sins
- Help me experience your love at the deepest level
- Bring me to that day of days where when I breathe my last, I will be taken to heaven with you and all those I love but see no longer.

And then give us all a desire Lord to go and tell it on the mountain, that Jesus is for everyone!

Amen.