Isaiah 9:2-7

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

The story goes that a man had a six-year-old son who asked what they were going to do on Christmas. The father said they would get up, open their gifts and then go to church. The son was aghast! “Church? We’re going to church on Christmas?” His father explained that Christmas has a lot to do with church and added, “It’s all about the birth of Jesus and God coming to us.” The little boy said, “I know all that but church wrecks everything!”

I’m sure nothing like that has ever been heard in your household, that church wrecks everything. But what if the One it promotes, born on Christmas, was indeed born to wreck everything?

That will not square with the prevailing “Hallmark Channel” view of Christmas. Our culture has domesticated this night with visions of sugar-plums and eight tiny reindeer. Let’s keep that, for our children, but let’s also quietly remember both the cradle and the cross are a scandal.

The scandal of Christmas – of God-with-us – is tamed and domesticated through sentimentality. To be honest, we do this even in the church. Consider the opening line of *O Little Town of Bethlehem*: “How still we see thee lie.” When I visited Bethlehem a few years ago my tour bus was boarded by rifle-toting guards giving us the once over because we were leaving Israeli territory and entering Palestinian holdings. The image of Bethlehem as peaceful is more a matter of longing than of historical reality. And what about *Away in a Manger*? We sing: “The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.” Any health care professional would call that a zero on the Apgar score and begin CPR immediately.

We sentimentalize Christmas. We also laden it – unfairly – with impossible emotional expectations. Those family get-togethers that we hope will be happy are often tense and uncomfortable; those estranged relationships that we hope will be healed in some kind of Christmas miracle just remain doggedly broken.

Besides the sentimentality and unfair emotional burden of Christmas, there’s the pressure to over-consume. It is a pressure to buy and spend, only to dread the credit card bill in January. It is pressure to over-indulge in food and drink, only to dread the bathroom scale.

Perhaps we need this child of God to wreck what we’ve made of Christmas. His birth was the plan of a subversive God who snuck in the back door of history with a mission. Coming as one of us – vulnerable, poor, and powerless – Christ came to upend the world as we have constructed it.

He came to wreck our selfishness and narcissism, so that we can learn to love God, each other, and all created things. He came to wreck our fear of death, so that we might be able to live fully and freely, here and now. He came to wreck the power systems which oppress and demean, so that all of us might enjoy justice and peace.

He came to break down our tendency to form tribes that pit one group against another, whether we call them faith traditions, political parties, or ethnic groups. He came to break down an economy based on things that pass away rather than on things eternal. He came to break down our ideas of family in order to embrace a wider vision of God’s family. God has a family in which no one is excluded.

Christ came to wreck every structure we build which puts us first at the expense of everyone else. As he would later tell his followers, he came not to be served but to serve. And he calls us to follow in his path.

For more than 2000 years now, people have come together to mark the birth of Christ as God’s way of wrecking everything for the sake of bringing about something greater than we could ask for or imagine. May this holy child, this holy one-man-wrecking-crew, disrupt your life long enough to plant the grace of God in your heart. May you come to know how deeply you are loved.