

Christmas Eve-2022

Luke 2:1-20

When children put on their rendition of the Christmas account, sometimes they go off script. The children playing the role of Mary and Joseph show up at the Bethlehem Inn knocking on the door. The Innkeeper opens the door and Joseph looks in through the open door, then turns to Mary and says, "This place is a dump, let go to the barn."

My wife has been pushing for these 25 years of ministry to hold the Sunday school program or even take the Christmas eve service to a barn and do it there, with communion and all. Yes, even in places like NW MO or NW Ohio or even NW Iowa places where we have served. You better bundle and there better be a lot of hot drinks available. I suppose it is her attempt to get a feel and to imagine what the first Christmas might have been like. You see Liz is really hands on. And you don't more hands on than trying to re-enact Christmas in a Barn in the early winter. It certainly takes the pristine and romantic ways we have tried to portray Christmas in our lives.

So here we are on this most holy night in our church year to celebrate a birth that is the most significant birth in world history. We are not in gathered in cold barn with cattle or other livestock witnesses, but in the warmth of our sanctuary surrounded by our families, loved ones, the children of God. Maybe we are here because this a sort of a home coming for us, or for others to bask in the comforting light of the gospel in a world filled darkness and division. Or maybe relive memories of Christmases past trying to recapture those warm nostalgic feeling from long ago. Whatever has brought us here, we are here to celebrate this most birth in world history. What makes this birth so significant? This birth announces that God has come into this cold dark world to be God is with us and for us.

The picture that St. Luke paints in our gospel tonight is anything but romantic. In fact, it stinks! Taxes brought the holy family to Bethlehem from Nazareth, not an easy 70-mile journey. We all desire to have Jesus' birth as a sweet and gentle silent night followed by a bright and hopeful morning where the Good News of the gospel warms our hearts, certainly not something that disturbs our hearts.

In fact, the ones to experience the bright starry night were shepherds. They experienced more than stars but the brightness of heavenly angels coming to bear the Good News of great tidings that the Savior has been born. It is

astounding that God would let shepherds to be the first to hear this message of Good News and have the first opportunity to worship him. In the ranking of society shepherds were right there with tax collectors. Maybe, scripture is trying to tell us the salvation is for those who don't measure up. Which would all of us.

Maybe we want to prettify the birth of Jesus because it is so much what we desire for ourselves. A life without spot or blemish, a life that sparkles like the stars on a clear night. And try as we might it is a life that you cannot attain by our own strength or might, since no matter how shiny we are on the outside we are all too aware what lies on the inside, it smells like a cattle stall. So, we need a cleansing, but we don't have the personal strength and even the will to do it! There is one who can cleanse our messy lives and He is the one who was born of Mary and sleeps in the manger.

Contrary to a favorite Christmas Carol with the line, 'No crying he makes,' in fact the baby in the manger would. He will grow up and cry with us, cry for us, both at Bethlehem and on the hill outside the Jerusalem walls. Yes, the one in the manger is the man who died on the cross for our sins taking on all our sins. The infant we try to prettify is the man on the cross crying to His Father in heaven for the forgiveness on those putting Him to death because they know not what they are doing.

We should celebrate any baby. Only one baby should be worshiped. Not for being a baby, but for entering this world the same way we enter it, for growing up like we grow up. And finally, to have those once baby hands pierced by the nails of the cross so He can defeat sin, death, and devil. He comes to you this day, crucified and risen, to make a home in your heart. He is God in flesh, not because our hearts need cleansing once a year in late December. He comes to shake the foundations of our lives and rise us up to the wondrous heights of His love.

Into our messy lives Christ comes. He's ready to move in to make all things new. Which means the spirit of the season is not over on December 26 or when the last present is opened, or when the tree is taken down and the decorations put away for another year. In fact, it is never over as long as the Holy Spirit calls us to the cradle to begin the faith journey with Jesus as grows, then baptized, hanging on His teaching, witnessing His healings, and finally to the cross-working peace and good will in all of us toward God and neighbor. The one in the manger is Lord and master of heaven and earth who has entered the messy places of life to make them new.

That is when we know for sure that the manger holds our savior, born this day and every day in the hearts of those who trust Him.

I pray this brings to each of you this night all peace of God that passes all understanding that brings each you a most blessed and merry Christmas. Amen.