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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Christmas Eve

December 24, 2015

Text: Luke 2:1–20

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Lk 2:7). I wonder if we can set aside all our Christmas nostalgia for a few moments and consider the extreme and adverse conditions that are being described on that very first Christmas.

Mary gave birth to Jesus, her firstborn son, and then wrapped him in swaddling clothes. That's pretty normal. To this day, newborn children are wrapped in blankets – swaddling clothes – in order to give them warmth and security. But get ready for the shocker! Joseph and Mary laid their wrapped bundle of joy in a feeding trough – for animals; that was her baby's first crib. Her maternity ward was a stable away from home, Nazareth, her hometown being 90 miles to the north of Bethlehem. Whatever dreams Mary might have had about what it would be like those first few hours after giving birth to a child, it certainly couldn't have been this. How many of you mothers would volunteer for such conditions? No medicines, no nurses or mid-wives, no doctors, no clean bed, nobody there but you – in labor – your husband, the animals, and your soon-to-be born Son.

But wait, we've already gone too far already. Why did Joseph and Mary have to use a stable and an animal's feed trough in the first place? “Because there was no room for them in an inn.” Due to the decree of taxation issued by Caesar Augustus some 1,400 miles from Israel, people had to return back to their ancestral homes to be registered. Joseph and Mary got caught up in the machinations of big government going about its normal business. Bethlehem, Joseph's ancestral home, was overrun with people from out-of-town returning to be registered in compliance with Caesar's decree. All the inns were full. Joseph and Mary arrive to see “no vacancy” signs everywhere. There's no room for an anxious husband and his very pregnant wife. Luke simply records Mary laid her firstborn child in a manger, an animal's feeding trough “because there was no room for them in the inn.” It's all they had available to them.

I wonder if we can set aside all our Christmas nostalgia for a few moments and consider how perplexing all this must have been for shepherds watching their flocks by night. An angel of the Lord – that’s frightening enough, an angelic visitation in the silence of night – told them about new tidings of great joy. “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:11). The Christ is born? A baby? The promised seed of Eve, the One who would crush the serpent’s head spoken of so long ago in Genesis 3, came as a baby? The prophet Isaiah promised that a child would be born as Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Is 9:6). No mention of the Christ being a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger in Bethlehem.

Speaking of Bethlehem? Shouldn’t the Christ be in Jerusalem, the capital city, the political and religious center of Israel? The Temple is teeming with priests and sacrifices all proclaiming that a Savior is coming. Should not His appearance be there? But the angel said, Bethlehem. King David was born there but that was over 1,000 years ago. Nothing of note has happened in Bethlehem since. Strange indeed.

Stranger still the angel said, “And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Lk 2:12). The authenticity of the angel’s word will be seen 1) in a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes – there’s nothing spectacular about that, 2) in a swaddled baby will be lying in an animal’s feeding trough. That newborn boy, born in poverty and absolute obscurity, is Christ the Lord.

A marvelous and strange story indeed. But what shall we do tonight and afterwards? Will there be room in your busy Christmas celebrations for that Christ? For that Lord and Savior? The one born in a stable in no-nothing Bethlehem, the one wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger because nobody took notice of a poor couple ready to give birth to their firstborn child? Will there be room in your heart, mind, body, and soul?

We make room for little drummer boys, 8 reindeer, *It’s a Wonderful Life*, baked turkeys and pumpkin pies, elves, snowmen, spirits of Christmas past, present, and future, Polar Express trains, mistletoe, and beautifully wrapped gifts. But is there room for the Jesus of Luke 2 in your 2015 Christmas celebrations? After all the lights and paper are out-of-sight and out-of-mind and the many events of 2016 begin to crowd in upon us, will there be room for Jesus?

I wonder if we can set aside all our Christmas nostalgia for a few moments and make room for the Jesus promised to us in Holy Scripture. For those of you who do will find the Lord God of heaven and earth. For this Jesus of Bethlehem would later go to Jerusalem. And there He will be the Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews, who dies on the cross and rises again on Easter morning. That Jesus will take away all the chaos and disorder and broken dreams that plague so many lives in this world.

Though born in obscurity and abject poverty, He comes to be your God and Lord. He comes to be your everlasting peace and lasting joy to which the great and marvelous events of today and tomorrow are but signs. He comes that He might find room in your heart and mind. Don't be afraid of what He'll find there. When we make room for Jesus, He takes what's there and makes a new creation. He gives a new heart, a new mind, and a reborn soul.

Just before Jesus went to His cross, He gave another promise to His fearful disciples. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms...and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (Jn 14:1-3). Jesus makes room for you.

Jesus is the Savior of the world. He was born in a stable and laid in a manger so that He might be Your God and King. He went to Calvary's cross and a borrowed tomb, that He might take away every fear, worry, and oppressive sin. The King of kings and Lord of lords made room in His heart and mind for you. He makes room for you in His eternal kingdom. May He find room in the depths of your soul so that your joy and peace may be complete.

A Merry Christmas to you all!!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.