

Gospel - Luke 2: 1-20

Christmas Day

Sermon 12.25.19

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Mary was most definitely a saint. How do I know this? Because in her ninth month, when airlines today won't let women fly, she traveled a distance similar to the trip from Shelton to Seattle, astride or beside a donkey, arriving in Bethlehem just in time to go into labor, at which point her husband discovered there was no room for them anywhere in his home town so she had to set up house in a stable where she had her child, laid him in a manger and then, if that wasn't already enough, amid a celestial commotion of, literally, astronomical proportions, she and her husband entertained a bunch of shepherds. . Move over, Martha Stewart.

We tend to romanticize the story of Jesus' birth. If you're like me you can't hear the Christmas story according to Luke without reciting the King James version in your head. It brings to mind the comfort of a grandparent's lap as the story was read in the glow of the Christmas tree, a Christmas pageant from childhood, or A Charlie Brown Christmas. The straw is clean, the stable is evenly lit, the heat is on and everyone gets their lines right. Mostly.

The real Christmas story features very humble people in incredibly lowly circumstances. Dirt, darkness, danger. A manger. Our Christmas story puts a manger front and center. Every baby of that time was wrapped in swaddling clothes, but the sign of Jesus' birth, the signal the angels told shepherds to look for, was a manger. A feeding trough. Probably not featured in Parenting Magazine. And an unlikely icon to associate with a king.

It's winter in Bethlehem. Cold by that region's standards, but probably no colder than the 40s. Rain? Unlikely, but possible. A stable provided shelter but hardly offered sanitary surroundings. And as Peggy pointed out last Sunday in her message, it was dark. So dark.

What's more, the region hardly needed another king. In Rome, Gaius Octavius, better known in our story as Caesar Augustus, rules the Empire. Quirinius is governor of Syria while Herod Antipas is the king of Palestine by virtue of his favors to Caesar. These rulers were surrounded by excess, temples and palaces built in their honor, riches amassed, delicacies to eat and women to pursue. Their names were on the lips of all in the realm. If they'd lived today, they would each have their own Twitter accounts and we would be anticipating their every tweet.

No, the people of Jesus' time didn't need another king. They needed a savior.

Jesus. Born in a stable, laid in a manger. A helpless newborn baby. The contrast is stark.

Yet, over 2000 years later, who do we remember? Who is the subject of literally thousands of hymns and songs, millions of parties and celebrations every year? While those rulers of the day have faded into internet notations we can hardly pronounce, let alone keep straight, Jesus is on the tip of our tongues daily.

At least I hope his name is on the tip of your tongue. Daily. And not just today, when we celebrate his humble beginnings. But every day as we celebrate our own humility. Our humanness. It's the least we can do for our God who loves us in spite of, or because of, our humanness. A God who loved us so much he gave us his son. A child, a king, a human who died for us.

Today, whether we head home to a house full of family or friends, or whether ours will be a quiet, contemplative Christmas Day, this is the first new day to honor Jesus Christ, our king and our savior. My prayer for all of us here at St. David's is simple: Feed. Clothe. Heal. Ourselves, and others beyond our red doors. Feed the hungry, with the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Clothe the naked, in the warmth of his boundless love. Heal by faith in Christ's unwavering grace.

Let us all do our part to recognize and reach out to those who are poor or sick in spirit. To awaken those whose flame has died. To care. To be present, not to get presents.

Christmas is a window into the religion of Christianity. Christ's birth and life and death and resurrection are what separates us from other religions, just as a manger separated Jesus from other babies being born in Palestine that long ago night.

Let's own it. Let's step away from our first world problems and remember the manger. As we ring in a new year, let us all step into the light, counting our blessings and taking to heart our beautiful Christmas story. Let us feed. Clothe. Heal.

What? You've got no money? You've got no time? You don't know how to heal anyone? You can barely feed yourself? You can't, can't, can't?

Yeah, you can. You can because Jesus took human form. Just like you. He was a helpless babe. Just like you. He walked the earth and lived his life, just like you. His beginnings were humble, more humble than most of us can imagine. His parentage was suspicious, his dad didn't have enough status to find housing in his home town, his surroundings smelled like livestock and he was placed in a feeding trough to sleep. While the manger was a signal to the shepherds and kings of where to find Jesus, the manger did not define him. The heavens did.

On that first Christmas, the world didn't need another king. The world needed a savior. The world still needs a savior. Thank the heavens we've got one.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will to all people.

Merry Christmas. Feed. Clothe. Heal.

Amen.