

God in a Manger

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Luke 2:7

Preached on: Sunday, December 25, 2011

Let's go again to Luke's gospel, Luke chapter two and I want to focus this morning on verse seven as we contemplate the miracle of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke chapter two and verse seven.

“And she gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”¹

The Christmas season is a marvelous opportunity to celebrate the birth of our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ, an event that is unfortunately profoundly offensive to an increasing number of people today because of the implications that that has on their lives. People basically say, “If Jesus was, indeed, the Son of God who came to die for sinners, then by implication that means that I must be guilty, in need of saving. Perish the thought.” So people hate that concept.

However, most people have never even thought that deeply about Jesus. They just hate all of the religious aspects of Christmas because they hate Bible believing Christians. They hate the God that we worship. They love their sin more than God.

How else can you explain the rabid hostilities of non believers who object to nativity scenes being placed in public land or in public view?

Of course, Satan is behind all of this. As we look at Scripture we read, for example, in 1 John 5:19 that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And John went on to add in the next verse:

“And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”²

Now, as we look around we see that increasingly Satan is trying to obscure these marvelous realities of the birth of the Son of God by turning it into a season of fun and parties and giving and it has basically been commercialized. Just look at all of the advertisements, all the things that begin happening, frankly, about Halloween. You know, you see people starting to get ready for the Christmas season and it is all about peace on earth which basically means be tolerant of all lifestyles, be tolerant of all religious except biblical Christianity. Just look at the average Christmas card, the average yard display and you will see that the emphasis is always on Santa and Frosty, on Rudolph and Nutcrackers, not the sovereign Creator, Priest and King, the Lord Jesus Christ who came to take our place on the cross, to die and be resurrected, the one who promises to return in power and great glory.

¹ Luke 2:7.

² 1 John 5:20.

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And, of course, today it is even politically incorrect to say, “Merry Christmas,” right? Now we have to say happy holiday because, after all, we don’t want to offend Atheists. We don’t want to offend non believers according to them. And, frankly, even among many Christian people today, Christmas, yes, is about the birth of Jesus, but a paltry few will really bow themselves before him and submit to him as Savior and Lord.

John MacArthur has well said, quote, “The world is happy to let Jesus Christ be a baby in a manger, but not willing to let him be the sovereign King and Lord that he is. Yet that is the central truth of the Christmas story. The child of Christmas is God,” end quote.

You say, “Well, how come people can’t see it?”

Well, it is because of their sin nature. It is because Satan has blinded them. 2 Corinthians four verse three we read:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.³

As an eyewitness of the Savior, John tells us in 1 John one beginning in verse two:

...and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us — what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.⁴

You see, without Christ there would be no gospel. Without the gospel there would be no eternal life. And, obviously, without that there is no joy. And so what he is saying is that the more we know about Jesus, the more joy we will experience in our hearts.

So this morning we want to focus on our Savior’s birth by looking at just this verse here.

Now this is a very familiar passage, Luke two verse seven. It is, perhaps, too familiar. Many times these are verses that we tend to just gloss over like many time when you hear a child read a passage of Scripture they are just kind of reading the words. And many times as adults we end up doing the same thing. But if we meditate upon the profound significance of this piece of divine revelation, we are going to be truly overwhelmed by its meaning.

³ 2 Corinthians 4:3-4.

⁴ 1 John 1:2-4.

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So let me give you a bit of context here. It had been an amazing year for Mary and Joseph. They were godly, young, Jewish teenagers, engaged to be married. They had been justified by faith by a gracious and merciful God who was going to provide for them a Savior, a concept that to them was still shrouded in symbols and ritual and sacrifice and so forth.

But, as you know, in Luke one an angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and said:

And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end.⁵

Amazing. Put yourself in that position as a young teenage girl.

And, of course, Joseph was shocked to find out that his fiancée is pregnant. And, according to Old Testament law she could be stoned for her adultery. But he decided to be merciful to her and send her away secretly so as not to disgrace her.

And we read in Matthew one verse 20 that an angel appeared to Joseph and said:

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.”⁶

Now we know that Mary had a firm grasp of theology and a deep love for God. Her heart was saturated with the Word of God. You see that in Luke one in her *magnificat* and her great prayer. You see all of this theology. She knew that he was the Creator spoken of in Genesis. She knew that he was the Passover Lamb spoken of in Leviticus. She knew that he was the Star of Jacob spoken of in Numbers. She knew that he was the Prophet spoken of in Deuteronomy and on it goes. She also knew that the Messiah had to be born in Bethlehem because the prophet Micah had made that very clear. Yet she lives in Nazareth of Galilee, a long ways away. And she also knew that he had to be the undisputed Son of David. He had to be part of his lineage.

Now is all of this going to be accomplished? Who in the world is going to believe this tall tale?

Well, in the providence of God we see the Lord orchestrating all of these things to answer these questions and to set everything into place and through a complex saga of political

⁵ Luke 1:31-33.

⁶ Mathew 1:20-21.

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and military machinations, he moved upon the heart of Caesar Augustus to take a census in Palestine. And this would require citizens to return to the place of their ancestry for a registry. And so Mary and Joseph had to make about a 90 mile journey during the last weeks of her pregnancy where she would be riding and walking. Just try that the next time you are nine months pregnant, right? She had to make this trip, return to Bethlehem, the city of David, because that was the city of their ancestors. David was their ancestor.

And there, think about it, there the official stamp of the Roman Empire would verify that Jesus was, indeed, the Son of David as he had to be, the rightful heir of the throne of Israel, one that was prophesied in 2 Samuel seven, the Messiah that had to come from the loins of David.

So after about a week of travel, they arrive in Bethlehem and the Roman officials now would have demanded all of the best quarters in that area and so people would have to stay with family and friends when they would arrive. And as we see here in the text, all of the available lodging was gone. There was no room in the inn.

Now the inns were basically public shelters for travelers. They didn't have hotels as we think of them. They were little crude courtyards with crude shelters to protect people from the elements and many times they were open caves or dug out areas under an overhang. And this typically was places also where animals would stay, where they would have corrals and stalls for animals. And up on top, just like we would have here, they would have a loft for hay and in the hay loft, which had to be high in order to protect it from the animals so that they wouldn't get into it and, as well, from the elements, sometimes people could sleep in that hay, but they would also have mangers which is another word for what we would call a trough, a feeding trough. And this would be below. And typically in private stalls you have to have private stalls to protect less dominant animals from the more dominant animals that would run them off and get all the food and then your poor little donkey would be without. So they would have stalls. And these mangers, the troughs would be about waist high because you always want to feed, especially a horse or a donkey up high so that the dust settles and doesn't get in their nose and cause respiratory problems.

And so this would have been a little trough that they laid the baby in after Jesus was born.

No room in the inn.

Now if you have ever been in these places, as I have many times as a horseman and being around cattle, and this would have been primarily horses and donkeys where these stables would be, you... if you have ever been around that, you know that there is the pungent smell. It is kind of like ammonia which is just the urine on the ground as well as the other rolled elements that are located in various places.

And so this would have smelled like horse dung and donkey dung.

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Now imagine this. The Lord of glory, the Creator, the Sustainer and the Consummator of the universe becomes a human and he is born in a filthy stable. This filthy stable became the birthing chamber of the Lord of glory. It is staggering when you think about it.

But none of this caught God by surprise because he had ordained this very scene in eternity past to accomplish his saving purposes in those who he had determined to save.

Now my goal this morning for a few minutes is to really capture your mind, capture your heart and to lead you into this dimly lit, smelling, dingy stable which very well could have been a bit of a cave or a carved out spot in a hill side. I want you to join me in beholding the blood stain on the hay and the afterbirth and just look at this teenage innocence and hear their utter delight. I want you to smell the odors of the earth and of the animals and then gaze upon the King of glory wrapped in these strips of cloth.

The contrast is staggering and my prayer is that we, by divine enablement, will be able to grasp God's reasons for such a thing, his reasons for such incredible condescension so that we can stand in awe and behold the glories of the incarnation of Jesus Christ through the dusty air in his humiliation.

Now as I read this text and lived with it, I believe that the Spirit of God would have us look at three purposes for such a lowly birth, three divine intensions behind such an impoverished, obscure beginning. And what we want to do this morning is, frankly, answer the question: Why a manger?

And I would submit to you there are three reasons that jump out as we think about this text. Reason one is to picture the king's rejection. Secondly, to picture the king's humanity. And, finally, to picture the king's subjects.

And from these meditations I believe will surface some amazing truths that can be applied to our lives. So why a manger? First of all, to picture the king's rejection. This is a picture of the hatred and the hostility of the world.

Now the reasoning here is not all that complicated. Think about it for a moment. Man is hopelessly committed to his own glory, right? We are driven by the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life. It is a lifelong battle. We want people to look at us. We want people to applaud us. We want people to, at some level, worship us. This is the force behind things like Facebook. Please look at me. Please notice me. This is the force behind some of the bizarre getups that you will see and hairstyles and what not especially with young people. And as we get a little bit older we realize that that stuff isn't really all that important and we, as adults, pursue it in different ways. But the point is, man loves to glorify himself through self aggrandizement. And he naturally will worship anyone who portrays some likeness of what he wants to be.

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For example, some of the most godly women that I know attend this church, but the world doesn't worship them. They prefer lady gaga. Do you see how it works? Because of sin people don't see it. Man looks upon the outside. God looks upon the heart.

Now, had the Lord come to sinful man with even an obscure shadow of his resplendent trinitarian glory, man would have instantly worshipped him for all of the wrong reasons.

You remember that when they started following Jesus, most of them did so not because of who he really was, as the Son of God and the Savior, but because of the miracles that he did and the free food. I mean, they had the same problem back them that we have in the United States today. People are looking for a handout.

So we see people even in the New Testament when Jesus was here worshipping him for the wrong reasons. Remember the mock coronation of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. They were hoping that he would defeat Rome, that he would somehow heap blessing upon them. They said to him:

“Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD.”⁷

And then what you don't read is the rest of it was basically, “For he will exalt me and he will take care of me and he will make me successful and happy and boost my self esteem,” and on and on it goes, the same type of stuff we deal with today.

But reality is there is two types of kingdoms in the world and as I put this together I think you will understand this whole issue of how the manger pictures the king's rejection.

There are two kingdoms in the world. One is spiritual and one is physical. One is personal and internal. One is universal. But you must enter the spiritual kingdom first or you will never see the physical. And how do you enter the spiritual kingdom? Through humility, through brokenness, through repentance.

Jesus said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”⁸

A description of those that enter are those who are spiritually bankrupt. They are poor in Spirit. They have nothing to offer. They realize that they must cast themselves on the mercy of God in order to be saved. They are utterly destitute spiritually.

⁷ Matthew 21:9.

⁸ Mathew 5:3.

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But for the man, for a man to acknowledge that all that he is and all that he does is fundamentally offensive to a holy God is a confession that he will never choose to make apart from divine intervention. You remember Jesus said:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”⁹

He didn’t say, “Rejoice, just come on in, everybody.”

No, you must repent. The Jews, of course, thought that they were already in.

Now knowing how man’s selfishness and pride is enamored with the spectacular, with the grandiose and knowing how people would reject his call to repentance, the King of glory is born in a lowly stable, not Caesar’s palace in Rome. Here, dear friends, we have a picture of the poverty of spirit that is necessary to enter into the spiritual kingdom. And we also have a depiction of the world’s rejection of his terms.

So his birth portrayed the very antithesis of man’s selfish predispositions. Here he is the Lord of glory placed in a feeding trough, dressed in long strips of cloths, not in a royal crib adorned with purple silk.

Now, of course, the kings of the earth resented him then and they have continued to resent him down through history. Psalm two tells us:

“The kings of the earth take their stand, And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed.”¹⁰

And we know that Herod’s jealousy and hatred for anyone that would possibly be his rival, really fueled his passions to kill every male child up to two years of age in Bethlehem and all of the surrounding area.

The religious elite hated him as well as you read the story in the New Testament. They conspired to murder him. And even his own people refused to receive him.

“We will not have this man reign over us. No thanks. Want nothing to do with him.”

And, indeed, the world hated him, continues to hate him. And all of this is pictured by the kings obscure birth in that filthy stable.

I am reminded of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians one and verse 27.

“God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.”¹¹

⁹ Matthew 3:2.

¹⁰ Psalm 2:2.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 1:27.

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And, my friends, is this not a picture of that? He goes on to say:

...and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God.¹²

So the King of kings arrives on earth in a way that would picture man's need for humility in order to enter into the spiritual kingdom and also to picture the rejection of his life and of his message that would come in the future. He would be born in a manger and he would die on a cross, amazing. He would be born in a cave and later he would be laid to rest in a tomb.

As you look at his life you see that he would be wrapped twice in cloths, first at his birth and then again at his death. He would be homeless in birth. He would be homeless in death.

Matthew 8:20 says:

“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”¹³

And Isaiah predicted that men would not even recognize his work. In Isaiah 53 we read that he would be:

“... despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”¹⁴

Think ACLU today. Think about our culture today. None of it has changed. But let all men be warned. Even though he came the first time in humility, he will come again in glory. He came the first time to be judged, but he will come the second time to judge. He came the first time as the Lamb that opened not his mouth. And he has promised to come again as the roaring lion of the tribe of Judah. He came the first time and there was no room in then inn for him for those who belong to him, but when he returns again the entire universe will not be able to contain his glory. He was born along on a donkey attended only by two humble teens dressed in a peasant's garb, but according to Revelation 19 verse 14 when he comes again he will be attended by:

“...the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.”¹⁵

¹² 1 Corinthians 1:27-29.

¹³ Matthew 8:20.

¹⁴ Isaiah 53:3.

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He entered the world with only the cries of an infant. But according to verse 15 of Revelation 19 when he returns we read:

“And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.”¹⁶

When he came the first time he wore only strips of cloths, swaddling clothes. But when he returns again, according to verse 16 of Revelation 19, he will be clothed with a robe dipped in blood, verse 13. And then verse 16:

“ And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, ‘KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.’”¹⁷

When he came the first time only a few were there to attend him. When he comes again every eye will see him. Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. He came as an infant, but he will return as the sovereign King, the Lord of glory, the Lord of all.

But not only does God use this manger scene to picture the king’s rejection by a hostile world, but, secondly, to picture the king’s humanity.

Now you will remember that sinful man has no ability, there is no way that he can atone for his own sin, because as sinners we all deserve to die. God’s holy and infinite justice could not be satisfied apart from a holy and an infinite ransom. And only by his own provision could such a remedy every be accomplished. So this points to the need for a virgin birth, a virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had to be both God and man.

You see, Jesus had to take upon himself humanity in order to be punished in our place. Yet also he had to be God in order to endure the sufferings of all of the elect. This is the work of redemption and this work demanded what we would call a theanthropon, a God man, one who would supernaturally fuse the human nature with the divine nature and form in an indissoluble bond a miracle beyond our ability to comprehend.

Jesus was the offspring of David according to the flesh. There is his humanity. Yet as God, according to Micah 5:2, he was a ruler whose goings forth are from eternity.

You see, he had to be a man in order to bear the punishment that we as men deserve. But he had to be God in order to bear up under the full wrath of Father.

¹⁵ Revelation 19:14.

¹⁶ Revelation 19:15.

¹⁷ Revelation 19:16.

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So both the human and divine natures had to be supernaturally woven together. Think about it. How could Christ be our faithful high priest that can sympathize even with our infirmities unless he were both God and man? How could Christ be our Mediator unless he could bridge the infinite chasm between God and man? How could Christ be our King lest he become united with us as man? Yet only God can reign in our hearts. Only God can conquer Satan, sin and death.

The Holy Spirit had to produce this amazing union.

Beloved, please hear this. Jesus had to be conceived by God and born of a virgin in order for him to be both the Son of Man and the Son of God. Immanuel, God with us. A son of a virgin according to the flesh, but God with us according to the spirit.

What better way for God to establish the humanity of his Son than to have him born of a virgin and then laid in a manger?

According to Hebrews 10 verses five through seven, we read that in eternity past the Father prepared a human body for the Son, a body that would never be tainted by sin. He would have no sin nature, one that would become the perfect sacrifice to appease the holy justice of God. And so this all was the will of the Father and Jesus came to do just that, knowing perfectly well that why he was taking upon himself, according to Philippians two and verse seven, the form of a bond servant.

“... and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”¹⁸

And in Hebrews two and verse nine we read:

“But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.”¹⁹

You see, he didn't come just to die. He came to die for us as a man to become our substitute. This is at the heart of the doctrine of atonement which means to provide a moral or legal repayment for a fault or for an injury. Atonement requires two things and you must understand this to really understand what Christmas is all about, why Jesus had to come. Atonement requires satisfaction as well as substitution. Satisfaction of the holiness of God, the offended holiness of God. And this could only be accomplished by an acceptable substitute.

¹⁸ Philippians 2:7-8.

¹⁹ Hebrews 2:9.

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So not only must we have satisfaction, but substitution, substitution for the guilty party. That is us. And what would appear to be an unsolvable theological and moral dilemma was all resolved on the cross of Calvary.

Think about it. How could a holy God show mercy to a sinful man? How could he possibly do that? All sin must be punished. We know that the wages of sin is death. So there is a real problem here. How can the Lord extend his mercy and grace to those who have violated his holiness? You see, he cannot merely ignore sin as if it never happened and shower undeserved blessings on the sinner. For to do so would require him to abdicate his holiness. So he can't do that.

My friends the resolution is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Think about it. God paid the penalty himself causing mercy and justice to be united at the cross. And now, according to 1 John two and verse one:

“And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.”²⁰

Propitiation means to appease. He is the satisfaction, the appeasement of divine justice as well as the source of divine mercy, source of love and grace.

Beloved, this is why God had to become man. This is at the heart of the Christmas story. I hope you can share this with your children. It is not that complicated. The heart of the Christmas story is the ultimate atonement. There had to be satisfaction and substitution. Can you remember that? At the heart of the Christmas story is satisfaction and substitution.

You see why Satan hates this. You see why the world hates it. And there could be no greater demonstration of the King's humanity than to see him lying in a manger. He came to live a perfect life according to the law. He was even circumcised after eight days to obey the law and fulfill all righteousness.

Scripture says that he grew in all wisdom and stature and favor with God and with man. He came to experience all that we would experience, all of the pain, all of the misery, all of the sorrow and yet without sin so that his perfect life could be credited to our account. And, of course, that is the great doctrine of justification, the imputed righteousness of Christ to those who place their faith in him. Our sin is placed upon him and his righteousness upon us.

So in the infinite mind of God he uses the manger to picture, first of all, the King's rejection, secondly, the King's humanity and, finally, the King's subjects.

Now think about this. There lay the helpless infant, the Lord of hosts, the Lord of glory.

²⁰ 1 John 2:1-2.

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And you look around and he is not surrounded by kings and queens and princes and nobles. He is not surrounded by generals with vast armies at his command. He is not surrounded by business moguls or celebrities. There are not even any Pharisees or scribes. No Sadducees. No vast crowds clamoring his name, bowing their allegiance. You see, there is nothing here that smacks of human grandeur. Yet lying in that little trough, that little wooden cradle, is the Lord of hosts, the King of glory and he is accompanied by two teens with no claim to fame, at least according to the world's standards.

Yet, because of their faith they were children of the King, sons of the most high God, part of a royal priesthood as we learn in the New Testament, those chose according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, joint heirs with Jesus. And they were justified and sanctified by the very blood of the infant that lay before them that had yet to be spilled.

Staggering thought. Amazing.

Mary and Joseph, common folks, carpenter of Nazareth of Galilee, a region, by the way, that was known for being a place where the uneducated and the poor and the common man would live. Yet they were subjects of the King. Moreover they were adopted into the very family of God. All of these amazing truths, dear friends, think about this. He is the King of the weak and the weary. He is the King of the poor and the pitiful, of the broken and the bowed down. He is the King of the meek and the lowly.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:26:

“... not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.”²¹

That is me. That is you. What a picture of the King's subjects, not only in character, but may I add this? In quantity.

Remember Jesus warned there would be the few and the many. He made it very clear in Matthew seven that most who name the name of Christ will be self deceived. Translated, most people who are filling up churches around the world today and call themselves Christians are not. There will be the few. There will be the many.

But will you also notice verse seven it says:

“...there was no room for them in the inn.”²²

So you must understand. It is not merely a lack of accommodation for the king here, but also for his subjects as well. Think about that. There is no room for him, but also for his subjects.

²¹ 1 Corinthians 1:26.

²² Luke 2:7.

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The world will never have room for Jesus nor for us until the king rightfully reclaims what he has allowed Satan to usurp what is rightfully his and we will never find any refuge in this world. We will never find a place that is truly whole for he alone is our refuge and our citizenship is in heaven, not here. Think how quickly your friends and your coworkers abandon you when you start talking about Jesus, when you start talking about the gospel and the transformation that it has caused in your heart. Think of the herculean efforts in our country to remove any vestige of Christ in our culture. Still today there is no room for him among the monarchs of the world and there is no room for him among the religious icons of our day.

And, instead, what does Jesus do? He manifests himself in the obscure stables of those whom the world considers lowly. He comes in to homes and to families who want nothing to do with this world, who find their greatest delight in Christ alone. He manifests himself and enters in to faithful churches committed to the truth, not to those committed to numbers or grandiose ministries. Staggering, isn't it? Mary and Joseph hovering around their Creator to whom she has just given birth, huddled together and alone in an obscure and impoverished stable. What a picture of the true Church today where only a comparative few people worship the King and tend to do so in obscurity.

Although there were only two humble subjects invited to witness and participate in the King's arrival, it is interesting as we read the story that the angelic host was quick to spread the news. But I find it interesting. They didn't run off to Caesar or to Herod or to the royal dignitaries or to the religious elite, the Sanhedrin, to any of those, but to a band of shepherds, the most despised group of the whole culture, stinky old shepherds, the lowest on the socioeconomic ladder. And it is great.

In Luke two and verse nine, we read this earlier this morning.

By the way, it had been 400 years since the shekinah, the presence of the glory of the Lord had departed from the temple because of Israel's idolatry and had departed and left. They hadn't seen the presence of the Lord in 400 years and suddenly it appears again to a bunch of scruffy, smelly old shepherds. They remind me of some of my cowboy buddies that I know so well.

There we read in Luke two and verse nine.

And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger."

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Bible Text: Luke 2:7

Preached on: Sunday, December 25, 2011

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."²³

That could literally be translated, "Peace to those to whom it pleases him to give peace."

You see, God chose to save some just because he pleased to do it. That is the point. The angels are not glorifying God because of something that man has done, but because of what God has done. God has provided a way for sinful man to be reconciled to a holy God, because of satisfaction and substitution and the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, salvation is not some prize that man earns when he demonstrates good will towards his fellow man as we see on so many Christmas cards and so forth. But salvation is God's gift of grace given to those whom he pleases to save. Staggering thought. What incredibly good news this was to Mary and Joseph and the shepherds, who, being recipients of this undeserved grace now run immediately to the stable to find their Savior and king laying in a manger along with two other fellow subjects who were likewise saved by grace.

And don't you know they must have stared into the eyes of their Messiah and as they did they had to reflect upon the incredible incongruity of the scene. This is God in a manger. Mindboggling. The Son of David in a stinking stable.

Why? Because God is trying to tell us something. He is trying to picture the King's rejection, the King's humanity and the King's subjects. I just pray that you have made room for Christ in your heart. I am sure there are some of you within the sound of my voice that has really never humbled yourself before Christ. You know it. You know that you live for yourself. You don't live for his glory. You are not looking for his return. You do not see him as your Savior. You have never been overwhelmed with the wretchedness of your sin to a point where you would cry out to him and say, "Lord, I have nothing to offer you, but my sin. And unless you save me I will perish."

I am sure there are some of you even in this sanctuary today that have never done that. And I would plead with you today that you place your faith in his saving grace, confess him today as your Savior, as your Lord. Believe that he died and he was buried and if he was raised again, that he is coming again some day in power and great glory, not to seek and to save the lost, but to judge. Don't just bow down before his manger in some sentimental Christmas gesture. But, dear friend, bow down before his cross in humble confession and repentance and be saved lest you be cut off from him forever.

Let's pray together.

²³ Luke 2:9-14.

God in a Manger

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Father, these truths are beyond our ability to fathom and what little we grasp by the power of your Spirit are so overwhelming to us. I pray, Lord, that these profound realities that have such eternal implications on men's souls will become the theme of our songs, that they will occupy our hearts, that they will cause us to speak much about our Savior and our Lord and that they will cause us to live for his glory knowing that, indeed, you have promised to return again. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Bless us this Christmas day that we might understand these truths and more importantly live them to the praise of your glory. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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