

# “A WAY IN A MANGER”

*Luke 2:1-20*

**Sermon for Peace Church**

**December 23, 2007**

**PURPOSE** - To call people to come home to life in the church, centered around Christ in adoration & service. EVERYONE welcome!

**MAIN IDEA** - God responds to our condition of homelessness by sending His Son to gather all people in adoration and service.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Let's open our Bibles to Luke 2:1 ... to the story of the Birth of Jesus.

1. I thought of this story Monday past when a team of us from our church were in Roseland, serving a Christmas meal at the CRC there - to a large group of men, women & children, many of whom were transported there from the Men's and Women's Shelters nearby.

- How meaningful that the Christmas story is set in a **CONTEXT OF HOMELESSNESS!** - Joseph & Mary unable to find accommodations in Bethlehem and so end up at a **SHELTER, a STABLE** - where Jesus is born.

(i) On any given night in America, 500-700,000 people lack a real home.

**GLOBALY** - the United Nations Human Rights Commission estimates 100 million people lack fixed, safe, adequate housing ... on any given night in our world.

- from poverty, natural calamity and forced displacement.

A. Imagine reading the Nativity Story in a refugee camp! - *“and there was no room for them in the inn.”*

2. But homelessness is not just about **PHYSICAL SPACE**.

As we've recognized throughout this Advent, it too is about the **HEART**.

= about **LONELINESS ... a LACK OF BELONGING**

- a lack of **SAFETY** - with its anxieties

- a lack of **PURPOSE & IDENTITY** - that a home brings.

(i) It's not far-fetched to imagine Mary & Joseph also **TASTING** this type of homelessness that first Christmas.

- Pregnant & not yet married, away from family
- At one point considering breaking his engagement to her.

A. Yes, they believed that God was uniquely at work in their life - but like every believer in this age, their faith still had to wrestle with questions & doubt.

B. Yes, they had each other - but broken trust still takes time to heal.

(ii) Who can I trust? What is going on in my life? To whom do I belong? Who am I?

3. That first Christmas God POWERFULLY ANSWERED those questions of homelessness raises by SETTING His Presence in the midst of this world ...

... Drawing creation together AROUND His Son ...

... FORMING THE CHURCH - for Mary & Joseph, for you and I ...

... giving them a HOME.

- Not the eternal home yet, but a HARBINGER of it - a FORETASTE.

(i) The CHURCH is a SIGN of home - a BASE of safety on the path there - a place of belonging & identity, centered around Christ.

4. Our Advent theme is “Home for the Holidays”. Let’s read about this HOME - the CHURCH.

- Where it meets, who gathers there, and what it means to be the church.

*Read Luke 2:1-20*

## **II. WHERE THE CHURCH MEETS**

1. Home is a place where you BELONG.

Where you have photos on the wall ... you have a PLACE there.

It’s where you are KNOWN, LOVED, CHERISHED - artwork on the fridge.

- where you are PROTECTED & SAFE

- where you have an IDENTITY ... shaped by those around you.

Again today, our Advent call is to come home ... to God’s HOME, like Mary & Joseph.

(i) Here’s WHERE His family GATHERS (point to manger)

Verse 12 - *This will be a sign to you: You will find a babe wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.*

God's home in this age is a MANGER - a place of HUMILITY  
 -a FEEDING TROUGH for animals - set in a STABLE- typically,  
 back then, a CAVE in the side of a hill

- you don't need to get dressed up to enter a stable.

A. He comes as a BABY - the least intimidating of human beings.

- Sometime with adults or teens, you want to make an IMPRESSION. But with a BABY, who cares? You can come as you are - don't worry about straightening the tie!

2. Who would ever have thought that that's where God would set up home in this world? - In a CAVE ... in a MANGER ... wrapped in CLOTHS

(i) It takes SPECIAL REVELATION to understand this - no less dramatic than the angels coming to the shepherds

-If you want to be with God in this age, you must join Him at a place of HUMILITY / EMPTINESS / POVERTY OF SPIRIT

*Blessed are the poor, theirs is the kingdom.*

- You've got to go DOWN, not up - *Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up.*

PRAYING: "God, I am weak ... I am poor ... I am needy ... I am broken ... I cannot fix things. I need you ... My wisdom, my salvation comes from you.

A. The TREES in our story first had to be CUT DOWN before they could meet Jesus and become noble, useful. They were humbled.

*To gain true life, Jesus says, you must first lose it - give up your self to follow me.*

3. The manger PREFIGURES another time later when Jesus was wrapped in cloth.

- Then He was not PLACED in wood, but NAILED to it.

- At BIRTH, there was no room for him and He ended up in a Stable-Cave.

At DEATH, he again was rejected and ended up in a Tomb-Cave.

- The manger points to the CROSS where God PUBLICLY displayed His humility. *He loses his life for GOD'S WILL, will gain it.*

4. So to meet God and come to His Home means HUMBLING ourselves.

- With that challenge you face, that problem, that opportunity ... > "Lord, n apart from you I am nothing. Have mercy on me, a sinner."

5. The church is the gathering of those who have SO HUMBLING themselves.

- Meeting at the manger, the Cross

- The church are those who look at challenges like developing ministry in a changed community and say, “We can’t do it. But let’s get on our KNEES - because God has come among us - and we can gain His help.”

TO COME HOME TO GOD IS TO MEET AT THE MANGER.

### **III. WHO GATHERS THERE**

#### WHO GATHERS THERE?

Well ... Quite an assortment of people!!! (Panels behind)

- I hope you can find your place.

#### 1. Of course, there’s MARY & JOSEPH

- She likely a teenager (I thought it most fitting that Rachael & Jori sang to her last Sunday, “Mary, Did You Know?” - she would have hung in your group of teens.)

- Joseph, tradition has it, was older - perhaps in his 30's. A righteous man, a just & compassionate man - a good church member - single & a bit older.

#### 2. Then there’s the SHEPHERDS. They’re farm-hands. Back then, they would be uneducated. From the lower social stratum.

(i) I remember when Chris Spoor coming to speak to Peace church almost 2 years ago about his church’s journey to become an INCLUSIVE fellowship.

“Living Springs had made some good progress in becoming RACIALLY inclusive”, he said. And that they were just then being confronted with what it meant to be CULTURALLY inclusive. But the greatest challenge he saw was becoming ECONOMICALLY & EDUCATIONALLY ... CLASS inclusive.

A. The church gathered at the manger embraces the working poor, the uneducated, the shepherds.

#### 3. And ... a few weeks later ... the MAGI!

They didn’t make it to the manger per se. By then the baby Jesus & his family had found a house, it states in Matthew’s account.

But they’re part of the NATIVITY story - highly educated, wise-men ... rulers, leaders ... the extremely gifted!

(i) And they’re GENTILES - not from the same ethnicity as Mary & Joseph or the Shepherds.

#### 4. Then there’s the ANIMALS!

- God’s home has to include them - like most Nativity Scenes! All creation groans for a Savior. That too must be why Jesus was born in a stable. God welcomes all creatures to turn to His presence - for this creation is His! His

church embraces that reality.

(i) Luke's account does not specify which animals. But traditionally, in paintings & nativity scenes (going back to St. Francis), 2 animals are always there - the OX & the DONKEY - beasts of burden ... those who carry the weight of work in this world.

A. They're there in fulfillment of Isaiah 1 - when God chastised His people saying, *"The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger ... but Israel does not know, my people do not understand because they have rebelled against me."*

5. The OX & DONKEY are at home by the manger - ADDING to the statement that God's love in Jesus is INCLUSIVE.

- For homeless bodies & hearts, God has brought Jesus into this world to create the CHURCH - a place to come home to

- for rich & poor
- for young & old
- for Jew & Gentile
- for black & white
- for single & married
- for all creation
- FOR YOU!

His love is UNCONDITIONAL. His love is humble & SUBMISSIVE to our deepest needs. His love is INCLUSIVE.

- He welcomes YOU home to it today ... among us, the Church!

(i) DO YOU HEAR THE ANGEL (the messenger)? - *"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for ALL people! ... TODAY in the town of David a Savior has been born to YOU! ... He is Christ the Lord."*

#### **IV. HOW TO COME HOME**

When the Shepherds heard this they said, "LET'S GO ... Let's journey to this place at Bethlehem."

- HOW DO WE COME HOME? ... AND HOW DO WE DO CHURCH SO THAT IT TRULY IS GOD'S HOME?

The RESPONSES of those gathered show us:

1. The MAGI bowed before the Son and gave Him their gold, frankincense and myrrh. They WORSHIPED! They adored. They declared His worth!

- That's how you come home.

- That's how we do church - with genuine worship - no pretending here please!

Worship Him ... and then give Him your best, your all - your SELF!

*My finest gift I bring ... pa rap a pum pum*

2. The SHEPHERDS remind us that to COME HOME is to BEAR WITNESS.

Verse 17 - When they found the child ... *they SPREAD THE WORD concerning what had been told them about this child.*

(i) They had a STORY to tell - God breaking into their darkness ... about angels / revelation / promises & hopes fulfilled ... and the light of God ...and peace on earth ... new life among us.

They told it! They shared how God was at work in their life.

... and that's what it MEANS TO DO CHURCH!

- to testify about this God who transforms our lives!

3. We come home by SERVING this Christ.

- Legend has it that the OX & DONKEY warmed the baby in the cave with their breath.

(i) I love that image! - It's one to take with you when you serve the hungry and empty. When you serve one of the "least of these, my brethren", it's WARMING the Christ-child with your breath.

- like Peace in Roseland

A. Homelessness is purposelessness. You come home when you make SERVING CHRIST in the least among us your life purpose.

4. We come home by TREASURING & PONDERING God's work in Christ.

V. 19 - *Mary treasured up ALL these things and pondered them in her heart.*

- That's DOING CHURCH!

(i) To "treasure" literally means "to keep something by guarding it" and its TENSE is continuous - as though Mary was chewing on these sacred events, not letting them slip away.

(ii) The word, “PONDER” has in it the sense of comparing - measuring one thing juxtaposed to another.

= thinking on those promises of God given to her people, over thousands of years, now being fulfilled ... **THE SAVIOR HAS REALLY COME!**

- The church ponders & treasures the work of God in Christ - **MARVELS** over it!

## **V. CONCLUSION**

1. In doing all these things, centered around Jesus, the **CHURCH** becomes God’s home on earth.

- a place of **IDENTITY & BELONGING** - for you and others.

(i) For Mary & Joseph, their homelessness is met in Jesus. God brought them **THE CHURCH!**

- Centered around Christ, shepherds & stories, **MAGI** & gifts, worship & service ... belonging & identity in God’s story.

2. Today the Word calls us to **BE THE CHURCH.**

- By treasuring God’s work in Jesus - and so become the same home that Mary & Joseph were blessed by.

- Let’s be the church - for there are many who are homeless, especially in heart - they want to belong.

3. Most importantly, the Word invites **YOU COME TO THIS HOME** today?

- In the worship, testimony and service of Jesus.

“There’s no place like home for the holidays”

**WILL YOU COME HOME?**

**THERE’S A WAY ... IN A MANGER!          Amen.**