

December 24, 2024

Christmas Eve

“God’s Child in Christ”

Luke 2:1-20, Titus 2:11-14

At the risk of upsetting the way y’all look at your nativity sets, I’d like to clue you into a little debate among scholars concerning Luke’s telling of Jesus’ birth. Most translations say Jesus is born in a stable because there is no room in “the inn.” The word translated there is “kataluma” in the Greek, and elsewhere in the Gospels it is translated as “upper room” or “guest room,” not as “inn”. So scholars are split, with some saying the stable scene is actually the first floor room of Joseph’s ancestral home in Bethlehem into which the animals were sheltered at night while the family resided upstairs. According to this thinking, Jesus was birthed downstairs because the upper room was crowded with family in town for the census. But no worries, lots of folks say it was a stable out back of the Bethlehem Motel 6.

Either way, everybody loves the Christmas story of Jesus’ birth. Wherever it happened, His birth is lowly and humble, the angels’ announcement to a bunch of shepherds way out in a field is the only thing glorious to human senses. The nativity is quiet, and heartwarming, and unobtrusive. There lies baby Jesus, true God and true man, all wrapped up and lying in the manger, a cute little bundle of eternal salvation being doted upon by Mary and Joseph. Everybody loves the Christmas story.

But if you go with the downstairs stable understanding of the story, why was it that Jesus was relegated to the stable? Because Jesus’ arrival would have been rather upsetting and disturbing in a crowded guest room filled with people. That’s no place for a young woman to be giving birth. Better for everybody if young Mary takes care of business privately, and more quietly, downstairs.

And not to be a downer on Christmas Eve, but that’s kind of disturbing. The promised Messiah, the Lord of Creation, the King of Kings is entering into humanity to save it from its just condemnation, and He is pushed out from the crowd because His entrance is inconvenient. The Prince of Peace lies in a manger in the basement while life goes on as usual just up the stairs.

We gather together to give praise in hymn after hymn after hymn tonight because we know the truth. It is our joy to give Christ the honor and praise that was absent in Bethlehem. He is the Christ who saves His people from their sins, who opens the gate of heaven to all who call on His name in faith.

Yet I couldn’t help thinking about those folks in the upper room above Jesus when I read the Epistle lesson for this evening. *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people...”* This is why everybody loves the Christmas story. Salvation arrives in Jesus, and Jesus is all cute and humble and helpless, not making any demands on anyone, not disturbing anyone. But there was no place for Him in the upper room because He would have caused a disturbance and nobody wanted that.

But St. Paul continues, *“...training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age...”* Jesus causes a disturbance. Jesus’ presence in one’s life demands a change. Jesus brings the gift of human righteousness to mankind, and His salvation causes those who are His to live in that righteousness. Jesus ultimately is not the quiet, unobtrusive babe of Bethlehem. Jesus is the Word made flesh. His is the Word of repentance unto forgiveness and life everlasting. His is a Word that disturbs the

comfortable, brings low the proud, terrifies the wicked, yet comforts the lowly, broken-hearted and poor in spirit.

St. Paul continues: “...*waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*”

Don't make the mistake of seeing this child in the manger as a humble, unobtrusive, passive thing just because His arrival is so meek, enchanting and adorable. Far from it! This child changes everything for those who know His truth, His mission, His promise for you! This Messiah arrives for your sake, to redeem you, to claim you as His possession. His desire is not to leave you separated from Himself in the world doing life as usual. He comes to do battle, vanquish the powers of darkness and bring you into the light of His kingdom forever.

His desire is to purify you, take away your sins and make you presentable to God. Jesus arrives to bring about a change in you that endures through this life and into eternity.

If the upper room theory of Luke is correct, I'm sure that there were some folks who, upon hearing of the birth, came downstairs to take a look, commented on how cute baby Jesus was, and then went back upstairs to life as normal. The shepherds came and saw, then left proclaiming that everything had changed because the Savior had arrived.

You know this truth. You know this promise. You know what this child grew to accomplish for you, for the forgiveness of sins. You know the child now reigns as Emmanuel, God with us, forever.

Don't be content with life as normal in the upper room apart from the Christ child. See this child for the Grace of God arrived for you that He is. If His presence in your life disturbs you, let it, because this is part of what He came to do. Let His presence drive you to your knees in repentance. Then let His arms raise you from the darkness into the light of His forgiveness.

Know what this child truly is, despite the humble way He enters our humanity. This child is the steadfast, sacrificial, unfathomable love of God made flesh...for you. Jesus Christ is flesh and blood proof the Almighty God deems you precious in His sight and desires your presence with Him in eternity. Knowing this, be changed; be claimed. Be Christ's child every day and forever.

Amen.