

Christmas Eve

Text: Luke 2:7

⁷and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.



Christmas Eve

Theme: A Night of Great Activity!

Christmas is a time with a lot of commotion. Some of you might have been shopping until a short time ago. Others might have had to quickly run from the table to the car to get to church on time, (or maybe just a little late.) We often have this image of Christmas as a peaceful time, but to be honest, it is usually very hectic. Even after church we are often hurrying to friends and family.

When we think of the Christmas story, there are parts that seem peaceful at first. Luke writes, “*She gave birth to her firstborn Son and laid Him in a manger.*” It sounds very quiet, but when you think of all that went on that evening in Bethlehem, it was probably very hectic. Tonight I’d like you to put yourself in the place of the people of Bethlehem as we remember this night of great activity.

I. It began with Mary and Joseph probably going from house to house, looking for a place to stay.

The census that Caesar ordered brought commotion throughout the empire. Mary and Joseph and thousands of other people had to travel to their ancestral home. For Mary and Joseph this meant a three day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Why would Joseph take her so far when she was about to have a baby? The Bible doesn’t answer that question, but it took them longer than anyone else to arrive. By the time that they made it to Bethlehem, there were no more rooms available. The word “inn” actually means a guest room. It is the same Greek word as the upper room that Jesus would use for the Last Supper. It was probably a guest room in a private residence, that was either rented or let out to family. Mary and Joseph were going from house to house, looking frantically for a place to stay. Every place that they came to had the same answer, “Sorry, we don’t have any room.”

This is a very sad part of the Christmas story. A woman was about to have a baby. Yet, no one would give up their place for her. The best that anyone would offer was the stable. The place where Jesus was born was not a barn in the back. It was probably inside the home, but the part where the animals were kept. It is an American invention to have the barn in the back. Until very recently, the animals were kept under the same roof as the people.

There was no room for Jesus. Somehow the same thing has happened today. For centuries the holiday was Christmas. We wished each other a “Merry Christmas.” We bought Christmas presents, and put up Christmas trees. Today we are wished a “Happy Holiday.” The stores encourage us to buy holiday gifts, and many communities have holiday trees and holiday lights. How many people are celebrating Christmas tonight with gifts, the tree, and a festive meal, but they never even give any thought to Jesus? It is tempting to celebrate the “holiday” without giving any thought to whom it is about.

II. Then the shepherds went from home to home looking for the Christ child.

After Jesus was born, an angel appeared to a group of shepherds. They were told that their Savior had been born, and that they would find the child wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. It appears to have been night. Most people were probably in bed and asleep. Now the shepherds went through the town, knocking on the doors and asking if there was a baby in a manger in the home. Can you imagine what the people of Bethlehem must have thought of these shepherds? Shepherds were some of the most despised people. Many of the people thought of them as low life. Now they left their flocks to go from door to door, waking up the people of Bethlehem to find a baby who was lying in a feed box. The people of Bethlehem must have thought that they were nuts!

But those shepherds were on a mission. They were told the good news that their Savior had been born. They wanted to find the Savior, who was Christ, the Lord. That same good news is also for us. The most important words of the angel's message are "Unto you." The good news is not just that the Savior is born. It is that the Savior was born for you. It is that He gave His life for the forgiveness of your sins on the cross. In the Last Supper Jesus said, "*This is My body, which is given for you... This is My blood which is shed for the forgiveness of Your sins.*" Jesus told us about His ascension into heaven, "*I go to prepare a place for you.*" The Gospel is about God's love for us in Jesus Christ. It is all about how God gave His only Son for us, that through faith in Him we are beloved children of God and heirs of eternal life. Like those shepherds we want to see Jesus. We find Him in a simple place like the manger, where His Word is preached and His sacraments are administered. Like Bethlehem must have wondered why those shepherds were on that wild goose chase, looking for a baby in a manger, many people wonder why we would come here this evening or why we gather for worship each week. But when we find our Lord, when we see Him as our Savior, it brings us great joy, just as the shepherds were able to return to their flocking glorifying and praising God for all that they had seen and heard.

III. Then the shepherds ran through the town again, proclaiming the good news that they had found the Savior.

Things might have just settled down from when the shepherds ran through the town, looking for the baby. You can imagine how they stood before the child, marveling that they were looking at their Savior. Then they left, but they didn't just go back to their flocks. They had to wake up the whole town and tell the people that their Savior was born. Luke writes that they spread the word concerning what was told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. They really did find a baby in a manger! They were told by an angel that this child was the Savior of the world.

That is the message that we as Christians bring to our world yet today. Our world is clothed in thick darkness, the darkness of sin. There is guilt, fear, and even a love of things that are wrong. But we have a message of good news for this world. Christmas is about Christ. It is about the Savior that has been born. It is about the forgiveness that we have through Him. It is our aim that every home hears the message that Christ came for them. It brings a lot of commotion when we share the good news. Some people would rather not hear it at all. They prefer the darkness of sin. But many people are left amazed when they hear the Gospel. They come to share our joy that the Savior is born for them. As Christians we cannot help but share the good news of Christ.

The gift of Christmas was given in a very silent way, but it brought a lot of commotion that Christmas, as Mary and Joseph went from house to house looking for a place to stay, as the shepherds then went from house to house looking for the Christ Child, and finally as the shepherds spread the good news to the people of Bethlehem that the Savior had been born.

Christmas continues to bring a lot of commotion today, but I pray that for us it centers around the heart of Christmas that unto us is born that day, a Savior which is Christ the Lord. By God's grace may it be our aim to find Him and share Him this Christmas Eve and always.

Amen.

*Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
December 24, 2009*