

Christmas Eve

(This Sermon was done as a children's talk)

Text: Luke 2:7

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.



Theme: *The Box that Held the Savior*

Many presents are given at Christmastime. In our Advent services this year we looked at several boxes in which God gave His people presents in the Old Testament. Today we will also open a lot of gift boxes, but the greatest gift of all was given in a very humble box.

Some of the boxes under our trees are big. Many times we love the big boxes. Can you think of a really big present that you once received? In our first Advent service we thought of a humongous box. It was Noah's Ark. The ark wasn't a boat. It was a very large box. It had as much room as a supermarket. But the ark was a gift of God. The whole earth would have perished in the flood, but this was a gift that life would continue in this world.

Some boxes are small, but they are very valuable. Did you ever get a small box with something precious. Small boxes often contain jewelry, things like an engagement ring. It is a very small thing, but something that we treasure for the rest of our lives. Here I have a small basket. In our second Advent service we remembered the basket into which the baby Moses was placed. Does anyone remember the story? The Hebrew word for the basket into which Moses was placed is the same word as Noah's ark. It was also in the water, and this basket saved Moses' life. 80 years later this little baby would be sent to Pharoah to redeem God's people from their slavery.

Sometimes the box itself is very beautiful. Did you ever notice how very young children are more interested in the boxes than the gift itself. They love to play with the boxes. Here I have a treasure chest that contains a stone. The stone looks very plain, but a family member from Denmark gave this to me. It is a Viking arrowhead. This box is a reminder of the ark of the covenant in the Old Testament. It was a box that was covered with gold, and it has a cover of solid gold with two angels on the top. It was a beautiful box, but it contained just two tablets of stone. The gift itself didn't seem precious, but this was the place where God promised to meet with His people.

Sometimes the box isn't very nice at all. Did you ever get a present that didn't have nice wrapping paper? I always feel sorry for my wife because her presents are not wrapped as nice as anyone else's because I'm just not very good at it.

Think about the manger in which Jesus was placed. Here is the one that we use in our church. Someone made it over 40 years ago from an old box. The wood is old. Some of the boards are broken. It is not the prettiest manger. A few years ago someone suggested to me that maybe it's time for a new one, but I think that this manger looks perfect. Do you think that the manger in which Jesus was laid was pretty? Probably not. It probably looked much worse than our manger. Most babies are placed in a nice soft bed. Jesus was placed in the feed box. A few minutes earlier animals were eating out of it. Now a newborn child was placed into it.

The box might not have been the prettiest, but it contained the best present that we have ever received. The shepherds were told, *“Unto you is born today a Savior, which is Christ the Lord...And this shall be a sign to you. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.”* They found the child and saw their Savior.

God doesn't come to us in ways that we expect. He comes as a servant. He took our flesh and blood on Himself, so that He could suffer and die. He took our sins on Himself on the cross. The prophet Isaiah wrote, *“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”*

When we think of Jesus' birth in a stable or His suffering and death on the cross, it is easy to reject Him. Who wants a baby in a manger or a Savior on a cross? It doesn't look nice at all, but He is your Savior. He took our sins, our sorrows, our sickness, and even our death on Himself, so that we could have His righteousness, strength, and life through Him. It is only through this child that we can have peace and great joy. He gave his life for us and took it again, so that we can be reborn as God's dear children.

He still comes to us in simple ways. He comes through the preaching of the Gospel. He comes when we are baptized. He gives us His body and blood in bread and wine. He comes through other people who are suffering and ask for our help. Are we ever ashamed of him? Do we try to hid our faith in Him or are we so happy that the Savior has come for us? The shepherds praised and glorified God when they saw the child in the manger. They believed that their Savior was lying there for them.

May God give each of us both the wisdom and the faith to recognize that even though the box might not be very nice, the gift is the great one that was ever given. In His Word and Sacrament and in the preaching of the Gospel, the Savior has come for you. Your Savior is born. May God give us both that joy and peace in Christ every day of our lives.

Amen.

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