

Christmas Day

Text: Luke 2:12

Theme: A Miracle of God in a Manger

I went to Israel for a couple of weeks in September. Of course we visited many churches and holy sites. But there were 2 buildings, which were especially noteworthy. One of them was the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, which is over the sites of Golgotha and Jesus' grave. The other was the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. You would think that these holy sites would have the most beautiful, ornate churches in the world. Nothing could be further from the truth. They are both in great need of repair because they are both owned by several denominations, and they cannot agree on anything. There is a ladder above the entrance of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which has not been moved in over 100 years because they can't agree. Until recently the roof of the Church of the Nativity was full of leaks, because they couldn't agree on how to fix it. When you enter the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, it is very chaotic. The church is a maze of many different chapels from different denominations. There are huge candlesticks in front of the Chapel where Christ had been buried. None of the light bulbs on the tops of those candlesticks match. There was a temporary barrier in front of the door of that chapel during a service, which belongs in a parking lot, not in a church. In the Church of the Nativity, you go down a stairs into the Grotto where Jesus was born. It is almost impossible to describe how bad the air is and how hot it is down there. The candles have also left a thick dark soot on all the walls and ceiling. Our group sang, "Silent Night," but the air was so bad that many people had to get out of there.



Church of the Holy Sepulcher

As I thought about it, it seemed to me that this is all fitting. When Jesus died and was buried, neither Golgotha nor the cemetery were delightful places. When Jesus was born, he was laid in a manger. But God's greatest miracle was in that manger.

I. Every part of the Christmas story is humbling.

An angel came to an old priest named Zacharias to announce the birth of John the Baptist. Outside of this one story in the Bible, we know nothing of this man. He was not noteworthy at all. Mary was a very young woman when Gabriel came to her to announce that she would be the mother of the Savior. When Joseph found out that his Fiancée was expecting, he wanted to divorce her at first. The two of them came to Bethlehem, but there was no room for them in the guest room, so they were given a place with the animals in a cave under the home. The Savior of the World was laid in a manger. When I was in Israel, I saw several of these mangers from the first century. They were not made of wood, but carved from stone. Think about that. The Lord of Lords wasn't laid in a soft bed, but in a bed of hay, probably on a hard rock. The first people to visit the Christ Child were shepherds, who were probably despised by the people of Bethlehem. The circumstances could not have been more humbling when Jesus was born.

But things would get much worse. The family had to flee to Egypt. They came to settle in Nazareth. When Nathaniel was told that the Messiah was from Nazareth, he asked sarcastically, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (Jn 1:46) When Jesus preached in Nazareth, He proclaimed, "Today this word is fulfilled in your hearing." The people drove Him out of town and tried to throw him over a cliff. (Lk 4:29) A man wanted

to follow Jesus, but He told him, „Foxes have holes, and the birds of heaven have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.“ Worst of all was when the crowd cried, „Crucify Him.“ He was nailed to a cross between two robbers. His disciples betrayed, denied, and fled from Him. As He suffered on the cross, everyone who passed by mocked Him and hurled insults at Him. He was forsaken by everyone, even His heavenly Father. It was as Paul wrote, „Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!“ (Phl 2:6ff)

II. Yet, we Christians worship this child as our Savior.

When Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist, John leaped for joy in his mother's womb. Elizabeth was overwhelmed that the mother of her Lord would come to visit her. An angel appeared to the shepherds who proclaimed, „Unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.“ They found the child in the manger and spread the word that was told to them about this child. Wise men from the East came to the child. They offered Him precious gifts, knelt down, and worshipped Him. One of the robbers who was crucified with Jesus, asked, „Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom“ When Jesus died, the Centurion declared, „Truly, this man was the Son of God.“ Thomas confessed after Jesus' resurrection, „My Lord and my God.“ When Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. (Lk 24:51)

We Christians today still worship Him as our Savior. He is the Savior, who was born for us. He came to save us from our sins. He promises that He is with us always until the end of the world. When he returns, He will give us Paradise. We rejoice in this child, who was laid in a manger because He has delivered us from sin, death, and all the power of the devil. „Unto us a child is born.“ Our Savior was lying in that manger. We cannot help but to approach Him in faith embrace Him as our Savior.

There is one more thing that I could like to share about the Church of the Nativity. There was once a large entrance door to the church. But about the year 1500 the people who controlled Bethlehem at the time did make the church into a stable. They brought their horses, carriages, and wagons into the church. In order to stop this, the Christians made the door so low, that everyone has to bow in order to enter the church. It is as Paul writes in Philippians 2, „Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.“ On Judgement Day every knee must bow before Jesus. It is my prayer that we will worship him now as our Savior, so that when He returns it will be a joyful sight when we see Him in all of His glory.



Amen.

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