

Summit Presbyterian Church
Preached by Rev. Sue Cyre
12/24/11

Text: Luke 2:1-20
Title: God Born in a Barn!

What a strange lot we Christians are, to come on Christmas Eve and worship the Creator of the universe who entered his creation as a helpless baby born in a barn. Who ever heard of such a thing!

We worship the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who was born in a dirty manure-filled, fly-infested animal barn.

We bow before the Savior of the world who depends on human parents to feed him and change his diapers.

We serve the God who became incarnate—in fleshed-- and dwelt among us—the God who was born in a barn.

The glorious truth of Christmas is that God came to us. If our lives are troubled; if we see no hope; if we are distant from God; if our relationships are broken; if we see no purpose to our lives; if we feel no joy—tonight is for you. Because this baby is God and he has come with power and love and mercy to bring us joy.

Our joy begins in the manger. Why did God choose to be born in an animal barn instead of a palace? Why did the creator of the universe choose to leave his glory in heaven and enter his creation in a stable?

First, it was the only place available. God doesn't force his way into anyone's home or heart.

Bethlehem was overflowing with people who had traveled there to be counted for the census that was ordered by the Roman emperor. When Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, there were no rooms.

Don't you wonder if Mary and Joseph told the inn keepers that the child soon to be born was God—the long awaited Messiah. After all the angel had told Mary that the child she carried was the Son of the Most High and that the Lord God would give them the throne of his father, King David.

The angel told Joseph that this child would be called Jesus, because he would save his people from their sins. The angel said that this child is Emmanuel-- God with us.

Don't you think Mary and Joseph would have told the inn keepers all of that about this child? If they did tell the inn keepers, apparently the inn keepers and visitors were unimpressed. Perhaps they laughed at the notion that God had come as a baby and then slammed the door. After all the doors had slammed, the only place that Mary and Joseph could find to stay was with the animals in a barn.

It shouldn't surprise us. After all, John's Gospel says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being....He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own and those who were His own did not receive Him."

His own did not receive him. Bethlehem was King David's birthplace. Bethlehem was the place where 700 years earlier the prophet Micah prophesied the Messiah would be born. Even though the Jews knew that the Messiah-King would be born in Bethlehem, instead of watching for him, waiting for his arrival, when the Messiah came, they slammed the door and said, No room here.

One author wrote, "Time after time, Mary and Joseph were turned away until one innkeeper gave them refuge in his stable. In these humble surroundings, the Savior was born. From borrowed stable to borrowed tomb, the Son of God would have no place to call his own. Turned away by innkeepers, in his final days he would be rejected by his own people. This child would become a man of sorrow, familiar with grief. He would know first hand the pain of isolation, loneliness, and suffering. From a wooden manger to a wooden cross, an infant's cry of birth would become a man's cry of death."

He came to his own and his own did not receive him.

In the last book of the NT, in Revelation chapter 3, Jesus says, "I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me."

Remember the famous picture of that scene from Revelation painted by Holman Hunt? It shows Jesus standing at the door knocking, but the handle of the door is on the inside. Jesus doesn't force his way into Bethlehem Inns or our homes or our hearts.

Will we have a place for Jesus this Christmas or are we too filled up with the things of this world to make room for him? Does it matter, even when we know he is the Messiah? Will we open the door of our hearts to him and give him room? Joy awaits us when we open the door of our hearts and say, "yes."

Second, Jesus was born in a stable to show us that all are invited to come to him. If Jesus, the King of Kings, had been born in a palace, he would be unapproachable. You don't get into a palace to see the king unless you have an invitation. And only the rich and powerful get invitations.

To go to the palace you have to first be cleaned-up—made presentable to see the king. No one who is dirty or unkempt gets in the front door of the palace. There are guards to keep folks out. Imagine if you went to Washington and asked to see the President? No one comes to the White House except those with credentials. Those who have authority and power?

How different it is that Jesus who was born in a stable to tell us that all are welcome at his throne. What Joy! Everyone is invited, not just the rich and famous but shepherds and peasants, young and old, washed and unwashed, sinner and saint, are invited—come, come. Come as you are, filthy with sin, come and kneel at the manger. Come! What joy is ours!

Third, Jesus was born in a stable because that's where you find lambs. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God. When John the Baptist first saw Jesus he announced: "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world."

That's what the myriads and myriads of elders sing in Revelation, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessings...to Him who sits on the throne, and to the lamb be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." Amen.

Lambs in the OT were sacrificed for sins. But, as the Book of Hebrews says, they never took away sins. They only pointed to the Lamb of God whose blood would take away the sins of all who believe in him.

If our lives are messed up; if we feel hopeless; if our relationships are broken; if we have some addiction, there is reason for joy this night. Christ, the lamb of God, who takes away our sin, has come.

It's been said that the only thing we can bring to the manger is our sin. That's all Christ wants us to bring.

I often quote Max Lucado—he has a way with words and images. He writes in his book, *God Came Near* what may have been Mary's prayer as she watched her baby son lie in the manger on Christmas night.

"God. O infant-God. Heaven's fairest child. Conceived by the union of divine grace with our disgrace. Sleep well.

...Sleep well. Bask in the coolness of this night bright with diamonds. Sleep well, for the heat of anger simmers nearby. Enjoy the silence of the crib, for the noise of confusion rumbles in your future. Savor the sweet safety of my arms, for a day is soon coming when I cannot protect you.

...Rest well, tiny hands. For though you belong to a king, you will touch no satin, own no gold. You will grasp no pen, guide no brush. No, your tiny hands are reserved for works more precious:

- ...To touch a leper's open wound,
- ...To wipe a widow's weary tear,
- ...To claw the ground of Gethsemane.

...Your hands so tiny, so tender, so white—clutched tonight in an infant's fist. They aren't destined to hold a scepter nor wave from a palace balcony. They are reserved instead for a Roman spike that will staple them to a Roman cross.

...Sleep deeply, tiny eyes. Sleep while you can. For soon the blurriness will clear and you will see the mess we have made of your world.

- ...You will see our nakedness, for we cannot hide.
- ...You will see our selfishness, for we cannot give.
- ...You will see our pain, for we cannot heal.

O eyes that will see hell's darkest pit and witness her ugly prince...sleep, please sleep, sleep while you can.

... Lay still, tiny mouth. Lay still mouth from which eternity will speak.

...Tiny tongue that will soon summon the dead. That will define grace, that will silence our foolishness.

...Rosebud lips—upon which ride a starborn kiss of forgiveness to those who believe you, and of death to those who deny you---lay still.

.... And tiny feet cupped in the palm of my hand, rest. For many difficult steps lie ahead for you.

- ...Do you taste the dust of the trails you will travel?
- ...Do you feel the cold sea water upon which you will walk?
- ...Do you wrench at the invasion of the nail you will bear?
- ...Do you fear the steep descent down the spiral staircase into Satan's domain?

...Rest, tiny feet. Rest today so that tomorrow you might walk with power. Rest. For millions will follow in your steps.

....And little heart...holy heart...pumping the blood of life through the universe. How many times will we break you?

- ...You'll be torn by the thorns of our accusations.
- ...You'll be ravaged by the cancer of our sin.
- ...You'll be crushed under the weight of your own sorrow.
- ...And you'll be pierced by the spear of our rejection.

....Yet in that piercing, in that ultimate ripping of muscle and membrane, in that final rush of blood and water, you will find rest. Your hands will be freed, your eyes will see justice, your lips will smile and your feet will carry you home.

....And there you'll find rest again—this time in the embrace of your Father.”

Glory to the newborn King. The King who came to a stable is the lamb of God who has come to save us. Joy to the world! Is there room in our heart for Christ this night?

Amen