

Finding Christ in Christmas

Christmas A

Text: Luke 2:1–14

December 24, 2007 The Humility of God's Gift of Love

The Christmas story in Luke's gospel is so very humble.

It's more than just the trappings of the birth of the Son of God
in the stable behind the Bethlehem inn.

It's more than the baby
being placed in a manger—
a crude wooden feeding trough
for the animals that watch the curious sight.

The humility of the birth of God's Son is best captured by the indifference
that surrounds this mighty act of
God's redemptive love for the world.

The streets of the City of David
were not empty that night.
So many people had come to Bethlehem for the census
that all the rooms in the inn were taken.

Presuming that most of the visitors would be staying with family,
we can only imagine how crowded
the streets would have been that night Jesus was born.

The Holy Family was likely
only one of many families
that had no place to stay.

What is extraordinary about this night is that,
except for the innkeeper who makes room for them in the stable,
no one makes an effort to accommodate the couple from Nazareth.

Yes, Joseph is an older man,
who can, presumably, fend for himself—
but Mary is young—very young—
and she is very pregnant.
Surely others see that, and yet no one
does anything to ease their plight.

If only we had been there, things would have been different.
We would like to think that we would have
given up our room for Mary and Joseph.

But, if we are honest with ourselves,
we are no different—
we are no better and no worse—
than those who went to bed that night in Bethlehem
thinking that someone else
would help the weary travelers.

Luther often chided his people for their self-righteous indignation
as they reacted to the indifference
of the people in Bethlehem,

When he heard the people of his church say,
*If I had been there,
how quick I would have been to help the Babe!*
Luther admonished them,
*You say that because you know how great Christ is.
Why don't you do it now? You have Christ in your neighbor.¹*

Luther rightly points out that
if we would do it for Jesus,
we ought to do it for the poor and unfortunate—
right here—right now.
We ought to do for those in whom
Christ dwells.

What have we given Jesus this Christmas?
Have we given him a present, or have we ignored his presence
in the poor and lonely...in the hungry and homeless?

Have we given Jesus and his family
a hot meal or a warm place to stay,
or have we given him the cold shoulder
as we rushed to do our last minute Christmas shopping?
Have we shared our love for him,
or have we given him lip service?

Christ is very easy to miss at Christmas
because he comes not with fanfare...
but in humble and weary folk.

Christmas comes to us with tired and hungry people
who need a place to stay, a helping hand, a touch of love—
people who want and need to be
treated with simple dignity.

Christmas comes not with fanfare—but with humility.
In the humble surroundings of a common stable,
the God of Heaven and earth
sent his Son as a gift of love to you and me—
a gift of love to fill our hearts with peace...and joy—
that you and I might become his love
at work in the world.

If we want to find Christ this Christmas,
we will not find him in the crèche
or in the Christmas carols we sing.

Christ comes to us in this act of worship
in the Word—as we hear the proclamation of the good news of his birth—
and in the sacrament—as he gives us his precious body and blood.
And he meets us here
in the hearts of one another...
and in the faces of all people.

Christ is here in our midst right now—coming to us this Christmas night.
Let us not give Jesus the cold shoulder.
Let us not ignore him—but adore him.

Let us embrace the Christ-child
that dwells in the manger
of the human heart;
let us embrace the living Christ
that dwells in our midst...
within one another...and within all people.

As we embrace him
in worship and in the human heart,
we will find Christ in Christmas
and be filled with all the peace and joy
that comes to the world
in this gift of God's love.

¹ Roland H. Bainton, *The Martin Luther Christmas Book*, (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1948), 38.