

Christmas Eve C
5PM Children's Story, "Room for a Little One"
10PM "Three 4s for Christmas"

How much room is there for Christmas in 2006? Are we truly able to celebrate the day when so few of us can focus on what really happened? We are so distracted by what actually matters very little about the Christmas Season. In fact you may have heard the joke which is all too sad: that Mary and Joseph were only permitted a one night stay at the Inn. Why? Because a public display of the Nativity was not allowed!

I wonder what I would have heard had I been there that night. Would I have heard the choirs of angels singing or simply the sounds of barnyard animals shifting around? Would I have seen the star in the sky that night or simply two poor and very frightened would be parents? Would I have understood the hushed silence of the divine presence, or simply the chill of a cold east wind? Would I have understood the message of Emmanuel, God with us, or would the cosmic implications of that evening have passed me by?

I am convinced that had other witnesses been there that night in Bethlehem it is quite possible that they could have heard and seen two entirely different scenes. I believe this because all of life is this way. God never presents himself in revelation in a manner in which we are forced to believe. We are always left with an option, for that is God's way. Thus, one person can say "Its a miracle!" while another says "It's coincidence." One comes to a conclusion by faith the other through logic.

Certainly very few people in Palestine saw and heard and understood what took place that night. The choirs of angels singing were drowned out by the haggling and trading going on in the Jerusalem bazaar. There was a bright Star in the sky but the only ones apparently to pay any attention to it were pagan astrologers from the East. If anyone did see Mary and Joseph on that most fateful night, they were too preoccupied with their own problems tending to their flock.

In one of the All in the Family episodes that aired some years ago Edith and Archie are attending Edith's high school class reunion. Edith encounters an old classmate by the name of Buck who, unlike his earlier days, had now become excessively obese. Edith and Buck have a delightful conversation about old times and the things that they did together, but remarkably Edith doesn't seem to notice how extremely heavy Buck has become. Later, when Edith and Archie are talking, she says in her whiny voice:

"Archie, ain't Buck a beautiful person."

Archie looks at her with a disgusted expression and says:

"You're a pip, Edith. You know that. You and I look at the same guy and you see a beautiful person and I see a blimp."

Edith gets a puzzled expression on her face and says something unknowingly profound,

"Yeah, ain't it too bad."

You see, what we see and what we hear in life depends not upon the events but rather on how we see the JOURNEY.

And the journey toward Christmas is one of three sets of number fours spelled out for us in Luke's gospel.

The First Set of fours is the story of Christmas. It is like Four movements of a symphony that take place within the story according to Luke. The number one movement is Registration where the decree from an emperor sets Mary and Joseph in motion.

The second movement is Expectation: that of Jesus parents -- but what of our hope?

The third movement is Glorification: praise comes supernaturally into our world as the heralds preach peace and "do not be afraid."

Isaiah prior to these heralds had given the Savior Four names – the Second Set of fours with each name foretelling the Deliverance by the son given to us: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.

The fourth and last movement of the Christmas story is the Jubilation: the shepherds representing humanity receive the good news and rejoice.

We know not all received nor rejoiced in the story of Christmas in Jesus day. Most were not looking for God's visitation. Perhaps the story was just too simple to believe. There was the inn keeper, the poor who Innkeeper has gone down as one of the heavies in the story. In our minds eye, we envision him as a crotchety old man with a night cap on his head sticking his head out a second story window and tersely shouting:

"Take the stable and leave me alone!"

Perhaps the innkeeper has received bad press. Preachers over the centuries for lack of something new to say about Christmas have had a field day with the poor fellow.

But you know something; the decision of the Innkeeper is telling about people today. This simple little statement about there being no room in the Inn becomes a symbol for Luke. As he writes his gospel it almost becomes a theme. Luke takes this one line, THERE IS NO ROOM IN THE INN, and shows us how this phrase was recurrent throughout Jesus ministry. How prophetic that phrase will be for modern man. The question that Luke leaves for us is—"WILL THERE EVER BE ANY ROOM FOR HIM?"

Making room for the Christ Child born for us leads us to consider the Third Set of Fours: the Four purposes for which God sent his only begotten son. The apostle Paul in the letter of Titus verse fourteen writes: he gave himself 1) to Redeem (or free) us from all iniquity 2) to Purify making us spiritually pure 3) to Make Us His Own adding us to his body 4) to Create zealous people (for good works). These Four purposes of Christmas can only happen when we open our hearts to Christ and hold nothing back. Will I make room for him this year? Or

will I ask him to take the back seat in my life? Is it more comfortable to give Christ the spare bedroom instead of the master bedroom!

It was the day after Christmas at a church in San Francisco. Pastor Mike was looking at the nativity scene outside when he noticed the baby Jesus was missing from the figures.

Immediately, Pastor Mike turned toward the church to call the police. But as he was about to do so, he saw a little girl with a red wagon, and in the wagon was the figure of the little infant, Jesus. Pastor Mike walked up to the girl and said, "Tell me, where did you get the little infant?"

She replied, "I got him from the church."

"And why did you take him?"

With a sheepish smile, the girl said, "Well, about a week before Christmas I prayed to the little Lord Jesus. I told him if he would bring me a red wagon for Christmas, I would give him a ride around the block in it."

Perhaps the way to make room for the baby Jesus in 2007 the baby Jesus must be taken away from the church so the true church can go and find him again! In the words of the King James Bible, "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be to all the people. For unto you is born in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." AMEN