

Sermon Christmas Eve Dec 24, 2022.

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We have just witnessed the story. Course we all know it, many of us know it by heart. We all know the place...

Bethlehem. An over-crowded city full of the very rich and the very poor. Invaded by all these people from somewhere else. A city where the Romans say how it will be. And when they've had their say the high priests step up and tell all of us the rest of the rules. Who will receive and who will not.

We know it. We have our Bethlehem's now. Our over-crowded cities where refugees try to find a place to sleep safely. Our downtowns where homeless people sleep or sit on the sidewalk around any corner.

We all know the sequence...

There's the pregnant mother - pregnant, full of life, full of God, full of something really really big that's about to happen This is not just any pregnant mother. What's about to happen will change the arc of reality on the planet.

What's about to happen will change our lives - 2000 plus years later.

No wonder we love to tell this story over and over again. No wonder we love to live it out with our Jesus Tribe. THIS is about who we are.

There's the inn-keeper. We can guess he feels bad about turning them away. Maybe he thinks to himself - "better out there in the stable with the gentle beasts and the clean hay than in here with the drunks and the noise and the spilled beer. And the smells of unwashed bodies, farts, and the smoke from the fire." Or maybe he thinks - "oh for Pete's sake! Why don't some people plan better!" Maybe he says to himself - "bloody refugees!" Anyway, they're out of his hair for tonight. He can go back to his business and try to keep the noise of drunken fights from drawing the Roman guards. Nobody wants that!

There's the father. Joseph. The journey took longer than he thought. Pregnant women - more stops than usual. Couldn't be helped. Hoped to arrive mid-day when there was still rooms available at some of the decent inns. Relieved that the innkeeper did *not* have any room - taking Mary into that noisy raucous mob? - not a good idea. At least this will be peaceful. No time to send for a mid-wife either - looks like our time has arrived whether we're ready or not. Thanks be to God for this quiet barn. And then he's with us. This child, this baby THIS ONE. The LIGHT. the shimmering air. The great silence. The sound of glory.

There's the cattle. Mooooo. We smell birth. We know birth. But wait. This isn't the same. This light! Has God come here? The air is shimmering! The wooden posts of the barn are singing! The hay is rustling and whispering as if it were still alive and growing in the field! The light! The light! Ahhh mooooo we see. We see a human being born but no... this is God. God alive here among us. Spread the word through the city. God is here this night. Cats and dogs, Rats and mice go share this with all who will listen!

Then there's the shepherds. ANGELS. Well. What's to say. Our families will never believe us. They'll think we've been drinking. This is ... Beauty. This is Glory. This is Heaven come to earth. This is Beauty, right? Checking with each other. They all saw it. They all heard the words. Better get going then. Doesn't pay to mess around with God. Look what happened to Jonah and Jeremiah. Don't want none of that. They bring their sheep of course. What else to do - leave them there to be hunted by wolves or stolen by thieves? Nope that won't do. Somehow they get through the gates - how did that work anyway - nobody asking them their business. No guards sending them back. Anyway, on through the narrow winding streets. Somehow they know where they're going. Clicking of hooves on the stones, Soft woofs from the herder dogs as they keep order. And then they're there. Outside the stable. They all know this is it. Couldn't say how. Most have never been inside the city before. Sticking their heads through the doorway, ready to ask permission and THEN... THEN... ohhhhh. silently shuffling closer. ohhhhhh Gazing in awe - the tiny baby. The glowing mother. the LIGHT. the shimmering air. The great silence. The sound of glory. And then it's time to go. Hard to go but time. Mother needs to sleep - that's clear. So is what was seen - that's beyond clear! Word will go out. The story, we see, has legs of its own now.

And then, days later, they're almost ready to head back to Nazareth. Only - the Magi. Camels right up to the door. Servants, pack-animals, This *is* the place - clear as clear. Only this? This stable? Not what we thought but there is no question and there he... is... on their knees, they who are usually the ones knelt to. On their knees with gratitude for being there. With heart-stopping awe. the LIGHT. the shimmering air. The great silence. The sound of glory. And eventually they remember - the gifts. Oh the gifts. Turning to the servants, shaking them out of their entranced states - Go! Go get the gifts! Setting them down on the dusty ground. What before would have seemed outrageous to put such precious gifts on the ground is now a privilege. A grace. A blessing to be here. to give the gifts, to be in this presence. Oh and how shall we ever resume our lives again after this? What kind of lives will we have? Who can we tell about THIS. this LIGHT. this shimmering air. This great silence. This sound of glory. Who of our colleagues will even listen or care... We will tell them.

And the whole time there is Mary - giving birth without her mother or her husband's mother. Without a mid-wife. She was promised a mid-wife. So hard. So afraid. And then... not. Then lifted up in light, in love, in child born to heal, healing already. This perfect baby. Wiping him clean. All ten fingers. All ten toes. Beautiful eyes - looking at her. Sucking at her breast and looking into her heart. And oh the LIGHT. Oh the shimmering air. Ah the great silence. The whispering sound of glory. This moment in time, tucked away in the stable, surrounded by breathing, by the quiet, by the night... Pondering. This. THIS. OH THIS....