

Christmas Eve - Luke 2:1-14

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Luke 2:1-14

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³ So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. ⁴ Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. ⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

A Simple Christmas?

The trend this year for Christmas, at least according to Midwest Living, Pinterest, and many other places, is "The Spirit of Simple," or "A Simple Christmas." Because of all the clutter that has filled up our lives around the holidays, the idea is to cut back and decorate simply, to celebrate a simple Christmas.

And that's what Luke 2 is right? Just a simple story... A man and his young betrothed wife go to Bethlehem for the census. She is with child. She lays him sweetly in a manger on a silent night and no crying he makes. Meanwhile angels appear to shepherds in the fields and tell them to go tell it on the mountain. Simple, sweet story, right?

If that's all there is to the story, why are you here? I know you have better things to do than listen to some cute, simple story. I mean, none of that really affects your life does it? So chaotic and complex around this time of year? "Peace on earth?" That's a nice platitude, but how can the Nativity help me? Our world is so much different than it used to be.

Actually, the Nativity story is anything but simple, and it's not just a story. First, there's the trouble that Mary, pregnant out of wedlock, somewhere around 9-months pregnant, has to travel over 100 miles to obey the Government's new census law and be registered in the hometown of her betrothed husband Joseph.

And then, there's the added complexity of what Mary and Joseph had to go through, once they got there: "So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered." Uh oh, so much for not being more than a couple hours from home near your due date.

And then, there's "no room for them in the inn."

The inn...this is not a hotel. Bethlehem was a small town, even smaller than Oregon. There's no hotels in Bethlehem, it's not that there were no vacancy signs posted everywhere. What it means is that the "guest rooms" were full (that's what the Greek says). Some of the people with guest rooms? Joseph's relatives. There was no room for a pregnant woman in Joseph's own

relatives' houses. This is outrageous. You think you have family issues at Christmas? Look at Joseph's family. You would think there would be one decent human being, one man who would say, "Oh, this girl should take my bedroom, I'll go take the barn." Now, there could have been lots of reasons for not letting Mary, Joseph, and the incarnate baby Jesus yet in Mary's womb, into their rooms. But none of them good, all sinful. The problem is probably some prejudice against this young girl who had gotten pregnant out of wedlock, and they all think Mary and Joseph made the whole thing up to cover up their sin. Even Joseph's family doesn't believe this whole Christ's birth thing. Mary, even though she was innocent in this, has to bear that cross and shame. And this will even be brought up 30 some years later when they of Jesus, "Isn't that Joseph's Son?" (Matthew 13:55).

Maybe we think we could have done better. We'd have made it simpler. If there was a pregnant relative of ours, of course, we'd give them our room. But what about Jesus? Joseph's relatives couldn't see Jesus yet, just like we can't see Jesus. But Jesus is here. Do we make room for Jesus? Or do we treat Him less than family, allowing Him into our lives only when convenient. Each of us could come up with a long list of reasons for why we can't make room for Jesus. But are they good reasons or are they sinful? How are we doing with the complexity of our own lives? Do we long for a simple Christmas, but never make room for Christ?

Our Christmases, like that first Christmas, aren't simple. They're filled with families grumbling and arguing, maybe even rejection like Joseph's own family, hurt feelings over not receiving Christmas cards from someone, disappointment over not getting the right gifts, and sadness over not being able to spend time with family.

All of this due to the complexity of our own hearts. Our hearts are sinful, completely depraved. When the angels appeared to the shepherds, the "glory of the Lord shone around them." And they were terrified. In that moment they were seeing the almighty glory of God, the same God who had filled all of Mt. Sinai with His glory, causing the entire nation of Israel to tremble. When God comes to earth, it's terrible and frightening. Our earth is filled with sin, we are filled with sin, but God is pure and sinless. We don't notice how sinful and helpless we are until we have something to compare ourselves to, like the shepherds did.

Christmas isn't simple. It's chaotic and complex; chaotic and complex because we are sinful. We often don't notice how sinful we are until God reveals it; when God reveals His glory.

But it's in the midst of all this chaos and complexity, that God's simple *message* of Christmas breaks through:

"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Do not fear. Good news has been brought to all people. The Savior is born. It's simple enough for children to believe, but complex enough that old men can't understand it. God has been born for all people; even those who rejected Him already by forcing Him to be born in a barn, Jesus is for them. Jesus is for you. Jesus came to save sinners. Jesus came to save us from the complexity of our sin and give us heaven.

Why would Jesus do this? It doesn't make any sense why Jesus would come to save sinners. Sinners do not deserve God's help. We do not deserve God's help. We do nothing for Him. We reject Him. We don't make time for Him. We fill our lives with so much complexity and chaos. Our hearts are filled with sin.

But that's exactly why Christmas wasn't simple.

This is the most amazing, glorious, miraculous, complex, mind-blowing thing at Christmas. Not the angels, not the singing, not the animals, not the shepherds, not the mother, not the "nativity scene," but that God became Man. God became simple, humble, and lowly, to save us. But there was nothing simple about it, it was the greatest of all miracles, that God became Man. But it's through this, that we receive peace. Jesus became Man to give us His peace.

Jesus uses His almighty power, which is beyond comprehension, to become Man, He then stops using it (at least always and fully). Maybe it seems obvious that a baby isn't going to all of a sudden be powerful and start reigning. And yet, this Baby in the manger is God almighty. He is. It's not that He was God, or will be God. He is God. He humbles Himself by letting Himself be born of a virgin and shamed by her own husband's family, being rejected by His own family, being born in a barn, laid in a feeding trough for animals, and eventually tortured, with nails and spear piercing Him through, dying on a cross. He doesn't use His power even though He had every chance and right to.

If Christ had used His power, what would have happened? Well, here at His birth, He would never have been cold - He not only would have been born in a house, but a palace. He wouldn't let Joseph's family reject Him. He wouldn't let King Herod try to kill Him. Later on He never would have gotten hurt. And most significantly, He would not have been killed. That would have been nice for Jesus, but not for us. If Jesus would have used His power to refrain from being killed, hurt, or cold, then the world would remain cold, hurt, and dead. Dead in our sins, hurt by the pain that sin causes, and cold in our hatred because of it.

It would have been simple for Jesus to use His power as true God. It would have been simple for Jesus to give into temptation. It would have been easy for Jesus as a baby to worry and complain. It would have been easy for Jesus as a child to talk back to His parents and ignore their authority. It would have been easy for Jesus to not die on the cross. That would have all been simple. But we forever be in the complexity of our sin.

The True God made Himself to become Man in order to suffer and die for the entire world. Jesus suffers sin, guilt, shame, torture and death, that the entire world deserved, so we don't have to. He takes the complexity of our sin. And gives us His righteousness. We receive what the shepherd's saw, the glory and righteousness of God. While Jesus gets what we deserved, misery, rejection, and death. Starting even before He was born, Jesus was rejected by men so men wouldn't be rejected by God.

Christmas wasn't simple for Jesus. His whole life was filled with trouble and temptation. But he doesn't want you to feel sorry for Him, because He did it for you. He wanted to do this for you. This is His gift of grace to us.

Jesus didn't come to the world to make your life simple. Jesus came because your life isn't simple. He knows how chaotic your life is, because He lived it. He knows how complex your sin

is, because He bore it. He knows how stressful your life is, because He shared it. He knows how painful being hurt by family is, because He felt it. Jesus shares your misery and sufferings so you can share His joy and peace. He takes your complex sin, guilt, and shame, so you can have His perfect, holy, eternal life.

And because everything Jesus suffered 2000 years ago when he came into the world, His coming today is simple and with peace. Here, in God's Sanctuary, because of Christmas, we are able to step into the presence of God, leave our complex lives at the base of font, and receive His simple gifts of forgiveness, peace, and life.

Christ gives this to you today in His Word. He gives it to you in Baptism. And He gives it to you in His Body and Blood - the same Body and Blood that was born in barn and died on a cross. That's Christmas today. Christ coming to you with His gifts. And it doesn't just happen today or tomorrow. It'll happen Sunday, the Sunday after that, and until Jesus comes again. Every week, heaven comes to earth, Christ becomes flesh, and we have a simple Christ's mass.

And just as He did 2000 years ago when He came into the world, He comes to trade your sin with His righteousness. To trade your complex, sinful life, with His gift of simple peace and eternal joy.

Merry Christmas.
Amen.