

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

Christmas Day 2020

LUKE 2:8-20

COME AND SEE THE SAVIOUR

The Christmas story is so well known by us that it's one of those stories that as soon as it begins our minds very easily go into auto mode. The mention of Emperor Augustus and his census immediately brings up for us the scene of the child in a manger in a stable in Bethlehem, surrounded by his loving parents, adoring shepherds, quiet and wondrous animals, and worshipping wise men. It's all so clean and shines with the radiance of God. This is the scene which we have so often seen and sung about, so it's not surprising that it's the one which comes into our minds as the story of Jesus' birth begins.

While there is nothing wrong with this pictured scene itself, apart from the fact that the wise men appear about two years too early, have we added so much to it over the years, and cleaned it up so much, that the reality of how the Saviour came into the world, and what this means, can get crowded out a bit? In the pictures we have the newborn Saviour is normally at the centre, but there's a lot of other detail around Him meaning sometimes He can be a bit hard to see.

But that's not how Luke records Jesus' birth. Luke doesn't give much detail, and Matthew, the only other Gospel to mention Jesus' birth, even less, so we have added a lot to help our pictures and songs. A stable isn't mentioned, but we are simply told that Mary, 'gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him on a bed of hay, because there was no room for them in the inn.' (Luke 2:7 CEV). The strength of this story is in its lack of detail: the birth of God's Son, something which has been promised to God's people for so long, now happens in such a small and ordinary way. In fact, the sign of this great Saviour is mentioned here three times by Luke as, 'a baby lying on a bed of hay'.

It's only after this very short and simple description of Jesus' birth that we see the bright lights and glory we expect. * An angel coming to some shepherds out in their fields, and then being joined

by other angels, that's how the birth of this Saviour should be announced! We can write some great songs and do some great scenes of that. And it is right, and not at all surprising, that the birth of God's Son should be announced in this way; this is the Saviour come for all people, the One who was promised for so many years. God Himself has come into the world as one of us, a human being, to go through all we go through. This is news which should be announced by God's angelic messengers.

But then, it's a bit strange, and I have to admit that despite knowing this story so well it's only really just struck me this year what a great contrast we have here. After the angels came in great glory, announcing the birth of the Saviour and praising God, they tell the shepherds how they will know the Saviour, the sign they are to look for. And the sign of this good news which will make everyone happy, this Saviour born for all? * A baby who you will find 'dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay'. When you look at it like that, the sign of the message couldn't be more of a contrast with the glory of the heavenly messengers who have delivered it.

'Go and see the Saviour', the angels tell the shepherds. * And so, they did. And for the third time in this story Luke reminds us that this baby, this Saviour, is 'lying on a bed of hay'. The sign was delivered to them in great glory, but it is so simple. And in being so simple the message of this sign is so strong: the great and almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, has chosen to come down and become a part of our world and our lives in a way which is so basic and plain and ordinary that we can have no doubt that He has come to be Immanuel; God is with us.

What did the shepherds see when they came to see the Saviour? * As lowly shepherds, looked down on by their society, they saw a Saviour who came not to be above them, but to be down with them. They saw the One to come to be their Saviour, and their friend. They saw God coming down to be one of them. Without knowing what His life, and death, would involve, they knew that here indeed was a Saviour who had come for them, and for everyone.

What did the other people in Bethlehem at that time see? We aren't told about them, but we are told that when the shepherds came to the child and told what had happened with the angels 'Everyone listened and was surprised' (v. 18) Even though this isn't normally in our Nativity scenes

or songs, remember that Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem at this time because it was the town of Joseph's family, so most likely his parents and other family members were there also. It is possible that around that manger there were adoring grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins, who heard the story from the shepherds about this newest member of their family and wondered about Him. Hearing that His birth had been sung about by angels what did they think as they looked at this tiny baby on a bed of hay?

Mary and Joseph, what did they see? Did they wonder that if God could send angels to announce the birth of this baby, surely He could have provided them with a decent room for the birth! Luke tells us, 'Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant' (v. 19), is that what he is referring to? What did they see as they saw the Saviour, the promised Messiah, as a baby lying on a bed of hay?

Most importantly, what do we see today as we are invited to come and see the Saviour? We know a bit more than all of those characters in this story, because we know about His life, and death, and resurrection. We know that He lives and rules today. So, what do we see in this sign we are reminded of again and again here; a baby lying on a bed of hay?

We can now see the one who came to bring peace on earth to all who know God's love, just as the angel sang. We know that as we peel back all the other details we have put around this story, in that baby, the Saviour, is the One who lived, died and rose again so that our relationship with God could be restored, and our sin and selfishness would no longer be a barrier between us and God. We know that in Him we can see that God has done all that was needed to open the way for us to come back to Him.

And we can now see, in this baby in a bed of hay, the love, the gentleness and humility of the mighty God who also comes to give us comfort and strength whenever we need it. This week a couple we know lost their baby when he was just a few days old. That is something that despite things I have been through in my life I cannot imagine what it would be like. But in the midst of their

unimaginable grief, they were still able to find comfort in and witness to what it means for them knowing their baby is now with our Saviour, He who was also one of us.

That is a peace and a comfort that we can't explain, but maybe that is what this is all about. Maybe that is what Luke was getting at keeping his description so short. In this sign, the baby in the bed of hay, we see God's love, God's forgiveness, God's care, God's comfort, God's peace. We can't explain it, but in knowing it is there for us we can experience it and we can live in it.

Not just as Christmas, but all the time, hear the invitation to you; come and see the Saviour. Know in your life everything He brings into our world. Don't let our busyness, or the other Christmas details we add to His story, crowd Him out so we lose sight of what it is all about. We are so often told that Christmas is all about joy and love, but at the same time for many it is a time of sorrow and hardship, and in remembering that also we remember why we have Christmas, why God came into the world. Come and see the Saviour, see what this baby in the bed of hay brought into our world, experience what He offers to us all in our lives. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

The Truth Behind the Trimmings

- Think about some of the traditions and details we add to the Christmas story. While most of them aren't bad in and of themselves, how might they crowd out the true meaning of Christmas?
- Read the Christmas story in Luke 2, trying to blot out our added details and just focusing on what is in Luke's account. What, in its raw form, is the meaning of this story for you?

Come and See the Saviour

Just like the angels told the shepherds to come and see the Saviour lying in the bed of hay, the invitation is there for each one of us now also.

- How does God give this invitation to you? Through His Word? Through remembering your Baptism? Through Holy Communion? Through other Christians?
- What does it mean to you that you know the Saviour? What difference does this make in your life?
- Pray thanking God for His love and peace, and the grace He showed in coming to earth as a baby, lying on a bed of hay.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
25.12.2020*