

December 13, 2020
Love in a Love-less Land
Luke 2:1-7

We have read the Christmas story in Luke 2:1-7 dozens of times. Every detail is familiar to us. One of the most poignant phrases of all is *"there was no room for them in the inn"* (Luke 1:7). We tend to judge the innkeeper rather harshly – surely he could have found room for a very pregnant woman? But maybe he just couldn't. We're not talking about the First World Hotel in Malaysia (the world's largest hotel – 7351 rooms). We're talking about a small First Century B&B in a small, backwater town, in a small, off-the-beaten-path country.

These were tough times. Hard times. There was little hope. Little peace. And little love to go around. Give the Bethlehemites credit for finding them room in a stable.

That little phrase, *"there was no room for them in the inn,"* is a phrase that ushers in three of the most profound miracles of Christmas ...

The miracle of the lowly

"The cattle are lowing ..." begins the second verse of "Away in a Manger." The fact that cattle may "low" is not the miracle. But the fact that there may have been cattle present when Jesus is born is part of the miracle. There is a miracle of lowliness associated with Jesus' birth. God could have commandeered a suite at the Bethlehem Hilton or at least a private room at Bethlehem General Hospital, had He so desired. There could have been room in the inn, if God had so directed things. But God chose not to.

God made the deliberate choice to allow His only Son, Jesus, to be born in a stable. It was not the nice, quaint stable we celebrate in our crèche at home. *"It was just like a thousand other stables, crowded with smelly animals, dark, damp, and rodent-infested. It was an all-around rotten place to birth a baby"* (Bill Hybels). That offends us, doesn't it. We prefer the romantic, almost fairy-tale picture of Joseph and Mary, glowing with wonder and worship, in a rather antiseptic stable. But it was not that way. On purpose. That's the miracle.

The point of Christmas is that Jesus does not come as royalty. With all due respect to Her Majesty the Queen (with an annual income of \$80 million CAD) and her family, that's the problem with royalty. They live different lives than the rest of us. They are out of touch. On the Eve of the French Revolution, the ordinary people were rising against King Louis and his queen, Marie Antoinette. There were many reasons for the revolution. But one of the chief ones was that the aristocracy, including the king, were enjoying lives of luxury and decadence, at the expense of, and indifferent to the suffering of the ordinary people. During a noisy demonstration at the palace gates, Marie Antoinette supposedly asked what the ruckus was about. *"The people want bread,"* was the answer. Marie Antoinette supposedly replied, *"Bread. Let them eat cake."*

Princes cannot identify with ordinary people. They live in a different world. The miracle of

the lowly is that Jesus was not born in a palace. He was born in a stable. You can't get much more lowly than that. We can't accuse Jesus of aristocratic advantage. He can identify with a baby born in Cameroon or Canada, in a refugee camp or Red Deer, in a shelter or the Chinook Regional Hospital. God sends His Son to experience life in its "earthy-ness." His first breath was laden with animal odours. The first noises He heard were the grunts of livestock. His first clothes were ordinary stable cloths. From day one, God's choice was to allow His Son to experience life on Earth in all its lowliness.

Why? Imagine if God had sent His Son as a prince. Would a prince experience life as ordinary people do? Would he live where ordinary people live? Would he eat what ordinary people eat? Would he wear what ordinary people wear? Would He experience financial stress, health problems, family problems and the host other things that ordinary people experience? Of course not.

And so, when we face the challenges of real life, we would have a God who could not identify with us in the least.

For many of us in Canada this may not be such a big deal. But in places where the church is growing by leaps and bounds – among refugees, in Africa, in Asia – this is good news.

Even for us, it's good to know we have a Saviour who actually can empathize with us and comfort us in the muck and mire of life – from weariness to sorrow, from financial stress to the loss of loved ones, from hunger to betrayal, from life to death ...

The miracle of the lowly is this: no matter who you are, where you are, Jesus has been there, done that. We have a Saviour who is not some grand prince way above us. We have a Saviour who has come as lowest of the low. He comes alongside each and every one of us.

The miracle of life

The second miracle is the miracle of life. What good could ever come from a baby born into such poverty? How could he ever amount to anything? Could He ever really have a life? Does He have any future at all? To be honest, things seem pretty bleak. Pretty dark.

The miracle of Christmas is that Jesus did live a life – a full life. Humbler than most, perhaps – shorter than many, perhaps – but a very real life.

- He was a refugee, fleeing as a young child with his family to Egypt.
- He had real siblings to deal with.
- He worked a real construction job.
- He lived in a real community.
- His father really died when he was young.
- He had real friends.
- He had real enemies.
- He suffered real hardship.
- He was really accused of things He did not do.

- He experienced real betrayal and abandonment by his closest friends.
- He really was the victim of lies and conspiracy theories.
- He really was brutally beaten and abused.
- He died a real death – a really cruel death.
- He was really buried – in a real tomb. It was sealed with a real stone and a real seal by the governor. And it was guarded by real Roman guards.

But the miracle of life does not end there. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead – for real. The evidence for the reality of the resurrection is overwhelming. The disciples saw Jesus, real, and alive again. The Jewish authorities could not find real evidence to disprove it. The Romans could not find real evidence to disprove it. Those who wanted to overturn the truth could provide no evidence at all to support their case. Jesus really was alive.

So the miracle of life is that no matter what we experience in our lives, we know Jesus understands. Do you ever feel like saying, *"No one understands?"* Jesus understands, because He's been there.

- Struggling to make ends meet? Been there.
- Discrimination? False accusations? Betrayal? Been there.
- Disappointment? Discouragement? Rejection? Been there.
- Looking ahead and seeing only darkness? Been there.
- Physical pain? Facing death? Been there.
- Loss of loved ones? Been there.

When Jesus says to us, *"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest,"* He says that as One who knows life: who knows what weariness and heavy burdens are all about (Matthew 11:28).

He invites us to bring all of our lives – the hopes and fears of all our years – into His presence. And when we do come into His presence, we come into the presence of the One who has overcome them all.

He gives us the gift of new life – new hope, new peace, new love, new joy. We have a future. It's not all bleak. It's not all dark. Jesus – God Himself – is with us.

The miracle of love

The stable is also a symbol of a third miracle, the miracle of love:

- Zechariah says, *"Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people. He has sent us a mighty Saviour"* (Luke 1:68-69).
- *"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him"* (John 3:16-17).
- *"God showed how much He loved us by sending his only Son into the world so we might have eternal life through him. This is real love; not that we have loved God, but*

- that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins” (1 John 4:9-10).*
- *“Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11).*

A “Saviour” – a mighty Saviour – that’s who this baby is. He is God’s good, gracious, amazing gift of love that we really might experience new life in Him.

In the long term, the gift of God’s amazing love means that one day, some day when you physically die (as we all shall), you, will rise to new life in the presence of God. We really don’t know much about what heaven is like, but we do know it will be wonderful.

In the short term, the gift of God’s amazing love means a radical new start – right now, this instant. It means all of our past can be forgiven – right now, this instant. It means the Holy Spirit is alive in our lives, renewing us, restoring us, teaching us, empowering us, correcting us, challenging us, guiding us, encouraging us – right now, this instant. It means that our lives can have real meaning, real purpose – right now, this instant.

You may have been a “Christian” for years (or maybe you wouldn’t describe yourself that way at all) – but maybe you need the miracle of love – the miracle of new life – to be “born in you this day”?

Are you just going through the motions? Does life seem hopeless? Are you feeling depressed? Anxious? Afraid? Sad? Do you struggle with guilt? Do you need forgiveness? A new beginning? To make some changes in your life? Do you need a sense of purpose? Meaning? The gift of God’s amazing love is an invitation to a relationship with Jesus as your personal Saviour, Lord, and Companion for the journey.

The miracle of love – the miracle of God’s love – is real. And it’s here for the unwrapping ... if we choose to do so. But be careful. When you actually, sincerely, invite Jesus into your life, you will be changed. God loves you too much to leave you as you are. The changes will be for the better. But He will change you. Are you prepared for that? Will you pray, asking Jesus to come into your life? Will you allow His Spirit to change you?

In Conclusion

Wherever you go this Christmas season, you will see nativity scenes.

- Remember the miracle of the lowly – God did not choose to shelter His Son from the harsh realities of life, but to experience them all – just like us.
- Remember the miracle of life – Jesus experienced all that life can throw at a person; He is a God who understands your life and can help us find new life in the midst of it.
- Remember the miracle of love – the gift of eternal life, of new hope, new peace, new love, and new joy in the present and resurrection in eternity – is offered to you.

Take a look at the nativity scene. It’s sweet. It’s sentimental. You can just walk away. Or you can see the amazing truth – God has come among us. He offers us love. He offers us life. You can invite Jesus to come into your life. You can ask Him for the gift of life ... real life, eternal life, Spirit-filled life. What will you do? What will you choose this Christmas?

Copyright ©2020 by Bruce Martin
First Baptist Church
1614 – 5th Avenue South, Lethbridge, AB T1J 0W3
(403) 327-2082
bruce@firstb.net