

Christmas Eve
December 24, 2009
Luke 2:1-20
The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller
Here's Your Sign

(Drama "Mary and Elizabeth" and Song "Mary Did You Know?")

WOW! Didn't Kristen and Janice do a super job on that drama and Val, Gloria, and Sarah on the song? I love dramas in worship. I love how they bring the text to life for us. It's as if we were there with them during that visit.

Our reading for tonight takes place 9 months later after Mary visits Elisabeth. Mary returned home to Nazareth from Judea and had been home for about 6 months. She is due to give birth with her first born son any day now. Oddly enough she and Joseph must go back to Judea to the city of David (aka Bethlehem) for the first census ever to be taken. It's a week's journey to get there. Could you imagine being 9 months pregnant and making that trip on a donkey for a week?

That's the background for our reading on this holy night. Luke 2:1-20... *(Read the text...)*

The shepherds saw a sign. Can you picture them leaving their flocks out in the fields and heading into town to see the sign? They did the unthinkable. They left their flock alone in the wilderness to go find the baby Jesus. What were they thinking?

(Enter in the shepherds humbly... looking around.... walking up the center aisle. They stop when the pastor asks, "May I help you?" They respond... "We are looking for the Christ-child." Pastor answers while pointing to the side door, "You will find him lying in a manger." The shepherds exit through the side door.)

I can picture the shepherd looking for the Christ-child that night, can you?

The sign that God had come into the world was a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The sign was not the heavenly host of angels singing. The singing angels pointed to the real sign. As the angel said, "This will be a sign for you; you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." I don't know about you but a baby (especially the Son of God) doesn't belong in a manger as far as I'm concerned. But that is where he was found.

One day this past week our daughter, Thea, started moving around the ceramic figures in the manger scene in our front room. I was surprised because she knows not to touch them. I thought she was playing. So I said firmly to her, "Thea what are you doing?" She calmly responded, "I'm getting baby Jesus. He fell out of the manger and I'm putting him back where he belongs."

How odd the first bed for the Savior of the world was a feeding trough. I want to know how that happened. Answer, it was part of God's plan.

There was no room for them anywhere in town because of the census. The holy family is staying in a stable. Camping in a tent would have been better accommodations. Can you picture the holy family there? Tired from their journey. Jesus falls asleep in Mary's arms and Joseph takes the animal's feeding trough and puts some fresh hay in it. It's just the right size for the baby Jesus. Mary gently puts him in the trough and there he lies sleeping. It makes perfect sense.

Then the shepherds arrive. Poor, lowly, smelly, humble shepherds and they tell everyone about this fantastic story about angels singing and a message that they would find this baby lying in the manger. He would be the Savior of the world, the Messiah, the Lord of lords and the King of kings.

Can you see Mary and Joseph standing there looking, wondering, along with the shepherds?

We are told that the shepherd's lives were changed after being in the presence of the Christ-child. They went back to their livelihoods – their vocation – their job with a renewed sense of God at work in the world. There was a bounce to their step as they went on their way. Can you see them? They left the manger praising and glorifying God as they went.

What does all this mean for us? Three things...

First, the altar is our spiritual feeding trough so to speak. "Take and eat this is my body given for you. Take and drink this is the covenant of my blood shared for you." Jesus continues to feed the world with God's love and grace. The perfect gift. No wonder Jesus started out in a feeding trough. The altar is our spiritual feeding trough today. Here we meet the Christ-child.

Second, there was no room for Jesus when he arrived in this world 2000 years ago. I wonder if there is room for him yet. Is there room for Jesus in the cradle of your heart? I hope so because that is where he longs to be with you in your heart. Jesus is God's gift to you for all eternity.

Third, like the shepherd our lives are changed after being in the presence of the holy one. I pray that you have been touched by the holy one here tonight. I hope that there is a bounce to your step as you walk out of here tonight to go back to your livelihood – your vocation – your job with a renewed sense of God at work in the world.

Here's your sign, a baby lying in a manger. This is God's ultimate sign for us and the world. So that every time we look at a baby we are reminded that God so loved the world that God became one of us not to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him – Jesus the Christ-child.

Here's your sign, God loves you. The baby in the manger is God's gift for you. Handle with prayer. Merry Christmas! Amen.