



Christmas Steps: VIA The Manger

Sunday 22nd December 2024

Luke 2:15-20

Imagine meeting a stranger who had never heard of Christmas and introducing them to this annual festivity. You show them how to make plans, buy excessive amounts of food, buy and give lots of gifts, and meet lots of people. And then you explain when it is all over we pack it away.

And this stranger turns to you and asks, “Is that it? You do all that just to pack it away? Is there nothing else? Something that lasts?” Aside from a few fond memories, presents and a slightly enlarged waistline, that’s it really.

1 And just like that the hope and anticipation of Christmas fades into the cold grey foggy days of January.

When you look at it from beginning to end; from the moment the first Christmas song plays on the radio to the last mouthful of Turkey is finally gone - it would be an odd thing to build a season with such great anticipation only to have it let us down at the other end.

2 I invite you to see something right at the heart of the first Christmas, something which has the power to bring lasting, eternal hope, in Luke 2:4-7,

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.

3 Let’s focus on the heart of it with those six words, ‘and laid Him in a manger’. The manger could not contain all that Christ is. Rhoda read for us from John 1 where the Bible says,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

He was there at the beginning, because He was there before time began. And what about after the manger, what then.

4 At the end of our last reading as a twelve year old boy He knew His purpose when He asked His worried parents,

“Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”

5 And what was that business? The Bible tells us in John 3:16-17,

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

6 Jesus did not come to just fill a spare manger and give a little more light to an otherwise dreary time of year. He came to die. He came to die for us. He came to save us, from the one thing we cannot save ourselves from.

7 The manger was not the destination. Jesus came via the Manger to get to His cross for you.

Christmas was never designed to just save us from the challenges of a year gone by and give a little something to look forward to only for everything to be put back in the box and do it all again.

If you believe the manger was just a place where it all started then He was just one of us.

8 If you go on one verse in John 1:14,

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

9 When you see who the One in the manger really is you see someone who had a different kind of glory. John says He was full of truth, which means everything He said was true. And He was full of grace, that means everything He ever did was full of grace towards others.

Or was He just One who happened to become a great teacher; a great healer. And once His life is snuffed out on that cross all you are left with is One who happened to become a martyr.

The truth is the angels and shepherds and wise men were not added into the story to embellish the manger and somehow make it more complete.

No!

10 Every angelic visit, every stunned shepherd, every studious wise man were there by God's design to point loudly and brightly anyone who looks into this story of the baby away from the manger to a wooden cross.

11 Listen again to the words of the shepherds from Luke 2:13-15.

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!"

¹⁵ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."

These characters were invited by the Lord Himself into the Christmas story and they are designed to lift our downward gaze transfixed by the wonder of Christmas and look up to the man on the middle cross, and you are invited too!

12

When the angels said peace on earth. But how does that work when of all the 2024 years since the baby arrived in the manger not one has passed by when the hatred and violence of mankind has brought anything but peace? Because the manger by itself could not and still cannot bring that peace God promised. The only thing that brings peace man to man, between co-workers, in your marriage or your broken family past, is the peace that God bought on the cross between man and God. And how do you find your way to the cross?

13 Jesus Himself said, in John 14:6,

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

14 By the way of the manger. That is the only way to the cross.

The manger is on the way to the cross.

As long as you stay like a child in awe of the sweetness of the manger baby and refuse to look up and see the manger man on a cross then can have no peace with God. And so long as you have no peace with God you will have no peace on earth.

But this day can be different, this Christmas can be different. And it can change everything that follows. Who for you ask?

15 John 1:12-13 says,

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

16 Now let me ask you a question - what do you want for Christmas?

17 Now let me ask you a better question: What do you want FROM Christmas?

If you just want things to be as they have always been then head home and make sure everything just as it has always been.

But if you want that peace with God and peace with others around then today must become your day of salvation. Today you need go to the cross and ask the Saviour will He give you that life HE died to give you.

This Christmas go to the cross, via the manger, and you will find all God ever promised.