

“Behold”

Micah 5:2-5, Hebrews 10:5-10
Luke 2:1-7

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Do you have questions about what happened that first Christmas? The children, over the past couple of weeks, have put together a few of those questions for me. It was interesting to see the kinds of questions they came up with. Mostly the questions were about the specifics. Who were those shepherds? How many were there? Were those wise men really wise? What about that manger? Was it really a stable? You can just see the children asking those kinds of questions. And sometimes, I suppose, we ask those questions along with them.

What really happened? We know that they probably traveled from Nazareth down to Bethlehem, which I believe, is about the distance from Spokane down to Moscow. It probably took them a little longer than it would take us. They had to walk, maybe ride a donkey, and Mary was pregnant. So it took maybe 6 to 10 days for them to get from one place to the other.

It was a real burden for Joseph and Mary to make that trip to Bethlehem. But he had to follow the rules. There was a census; he had to go.

He was probably going to Bethlehem to stay with a distant relative. We often think about that innkeeper saying “no,” but there probably really was no inn, per se, in Bethlehem, and the word for inn probably meant a guest room, or the second room of a house. Most houses in Bethlehem would have had the stable and the main living area right together, separated, really, by the manger. So when we hear that Jesus was placed in a manger, he was right there between the animals and the people. And while we can wonder all we want to about the specifics – who were those shepherds, those folks who came from the East – the very center of it all, that birth of Jesus in Luke, just takes 7 verses. It’s pretty simple. Right there in a peasant’s house surrounded by distant relatives, probably lots of people. Perhaps that’s part of the point, that it was a simple birth.

We hear of Caesar Augustus, the one who gave the command that everyone go and be registered. If he had had a baby, it might have been a little different. There probably would have been stories of them waving from some balcony. Everybody would have known. But here, when Mary had a baby, who knew that God had come among us? Nobody would

have known had the angels not come to those poor shepherds. The wise men eventually figured it out. But that initial birth—so simple.

There's something about that birth being simple that I think is part of the point. You see, if he had been born to some emperor, could you or I identify with him? If he had been part of royalty it would have felt very different to me. But he was born to simple folk. They didn't even have enough status to get the guest room, even with Mary about to give birth. He came to be among all of us. Nobody was left out. When Jesus came, he came, you might say, to the bottom, so that everyone knows that from bottom up, everyone is invited. I think he said something about that somewhere else, didn't he, about turning things around? His birth is that way, that simple birth.

And why not tell us all the details? Because all the details aren't there, we keep looking at it and find something new every year. I have that image of the inn so firmly imbedded in my head that I *know* there was an innkeeper, but it's never there in the scripture. And so each year I find again the wonder of that birth. The imagination comes alive, and isn't that part of it, too? It being so simple, we have that outline that we're invited to fill in because it's not only about that birth 2000 years ago. It is about that birth, but it's also about how Jesus is reborn with all of us, in each of us, among us, as we come in faith.

That simple child born in a peasant's home – anybody could have come. Anybody still can. We can all come to know the wonder of God's grace that comes in the midst of what seems like the most mundane, lowly of circumstances. God's grace continues to come in the midst of each of our lives.

That's what we celebrate at Christmas, is remembering that beginning – the beginning, not only of Christ on earth 2000 years ago, but Christ on earth with us, in our lives. We are invited to know the wonder of God's love and how, when it begins in us, it does grow like a baby. It becomes something new and wonderful. It in fact transforms us as we follow him. We, too, get to grow and know the fullness of the life of faith. So let's celebrate Christmas. Let's behold what God has done. Amen.