

## **“Every Day a Christmas, Every Heart a Manger”**

Date: December 18, 2016 Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: John 3:16-17; Luke 2:4-12

Theme: God’s Love, Christmas

Occasion: Advent 3, Max Lucado series

If Hollywood was to have scripted the birth of the Savior of the world, I doubt they would have had Jesus born in a cow stall. I mean we’re talking about the King of kings and Lord of lords. Surely they would have him born in a grander fashion, with loud announcements. Maybe a trumpet blast and spectacular scenery.

But people didn’t design this holy night. God did. And God was content to enter the world in the presence of sleepy sheep and a wide-eye carpenter. No spotlights, just candlelight; no crowns on heads of state, just cows chewing cud.

God made so little of his Son’s coming. He didn’t even circle the date on the calendar. We aren’t even sure of the exact date Jesus was born. Ancient Christmases bounced from date to date before landing on December 25<sup>th</sup>.

Some early leaders favored dates in March. For centuries, the Eastern Orthodox Church celebrated Christmas on January 6, and some still do. Only in the 4<sup>th</sup> century did the church choose December 25<sup>th</sup> as the date to celebrate Jesus coming into the world.

We’ve made bigger deals out of lesser comings. How could this be? No exact date of birth. No hoopla at his birth. Is this a mistake? Or is this the message?

Maybe your life reminds you of a Bethlehem stable: crude in some spots, smelly in others. Not much glamor, not always neat. People in your life remind you of stable animals: grazing like sheep,

stubborn like donkeys, and that cow in the corner looks a lot like one of the neighbors who lives on your street.

You, like Joseph, knocked on the innkeeper's door. But you were too late. Or too old, too sick, dull, damaged, poor, or peculiar. Maybe you know the sound a slamming door – feeling like you're always shut out. So here you are, on the outskirts of activity, it seems

You do your best to make the best of it, but try as you might, the roof still leaks, and the winter wind still sneaks through holes you just can't seem to fix. You've shivered through your share of cold nights.

And you wonder if God has a place for a person like you.

Find your answer in the Bethlehem stable.

Imagine if you will, two angels on a tour of the universe, as J.B. Phillips did. His Christmas analogy casts light on God's love. The angels fly from galaxy to galaxy, until they enter the one in which we live. As the sun and its orbiting planets come into view, the senior angel calls attention to a somewhat smaller member of the solar system.

"I want you to watch *that one* particularly," said the senior angel, pointing with his finger.

"Well, it looks very small and rather dirty to me," said the little angel. "What's special about that one?"

His superior explained that the unimpressive ball was the renowned Visited Planet. The lesser angel was surprised.

"Do you mean that our great and glorious Prince... went down in Person to this fifth-rate little ball..... "Do you mean to tell me," he

said, “that He stooped so low as to become one of those creeping, crawling creatures of that floating ball?”

“I do, and I don’t think He would like you to call them ‘creeping, crawling creatures’ in that tone of voice. For, strange as it may seem to us, he loves them. He went down to visit them to lift them up to become like Him.”

My friends, it really comes down to that: God loves us. The story of Christmas is the story of God’s relentless love for us. Let Him love you. If God was willing to wrap himself in rags and drink from a mother’s breast, then all questions about His love for you are off the table.

You might question his actions, decisions or declarations. But you can never, ever question his zany, stunning, unquenchable affection – for you. Somebody once put it this way – “If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it.”

The moment Mary touched God’s face, is the moment God made His case. There is no place he will not go. If he is willing to be born in a barnyard, then expect Him to be anywhere – bars, bedrooms, boardrooms, and brothels.

No place is too common. No person is too hardened. No distance is too far. There is no person God cannot reach. There is no limit to His love. When Christ was born, so was our hope.

This is why Christmas is so wonderful. It invites us to believe the wildest of promises – God became one of us so we could become one with Him. God did away with every barrier, fence, sin, debt and grave. Anything that might stand between us was demolished. He only waits our word to walk through the door.

Invite Him in. Escort Him to the seat of honor, and pull out His chair. Clear the table; clear the calendar. Call the kids and the neighbors. Christmas is here. Christ is here.

One simple request from you, and God will do again what he did then: scatter the night with everlasting light. He'll be born in you.

Listen as God whispers: "No mess turns me back; no smell turns me off. I live to live in a life like yours. Every heart can be a manger. Every day can be a Christmas."

The Christmas miracle is a year-long celebration. Christ can be born in any human heart, any time of year. If you haven't invited Christ into your heart, I invite you to pray silently as I pray aloud. If your love for Him has grown cold, and you wish to rekindle the affection of when you first believed, pray silently as I pray aloud.

#### My Heart, Your Manger:

Like the stable in which you lay,  
My heart is simple, frail as hay.  
But if you would within me stay,  
Make my heart your manger, I pray.  
Make my world your Bethlehem,  
Centerpieced with Heaven's Son.  
Make this night a shepherd's sky,  
Quickened bright with holy dawn.  
Rush the air with cherub wings.  
Brush this earth; let angels sing.  
A glimpse of your face. A taste of your grace.  
Be born in this place, I pray. Amen.

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Because of Heaven – Love is Born, Hope is Here*, by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2016, pp. 131-136.