

“Let’s Go Over to Bethlehem and Find the Christ of Christmas”

Date: December 24, 2017

Place: Lakewood UMC **Text:** Luke 2:1-18

Occasion: Advent 4, series

Theme: Priority of Christ, Christ in Christmas

We’ve come to the conclusion of our sermon series, “Let’s Go Over to Bethlehem.” Today’s sermon is “Let’s Go Over to Bethlehem and Find the Christ of Christmas.” Let’s begin with a story.

The Taj Mahal is one of the most beautiful and costly tombs in the world. The colorful legends which surround the building of the Taj Mahal are fascinating, but there is one that haunts and disturbs.

Sha-Jahan, the powerful Mogul emperor, was in grief. His favorite wife had died. He loved her deeply and he was devastated by her loss. He decided to honor her in a very special way.

He would construct an incredible temple, the likes of which the world had never seen. The temple would serve as her tomb. It would be a memorial tribute to her and the dramatic symbol of his love for her.

Her coffin was placed in the center of a large parcel of land and construction of the temple began around it. No expense would be spared. The emperor wanted to make her final resting place magnificent and breath-taking.

But as the weeks turned into months, the Shah’s grief was eclipsed by his passion for the building project. He no longer missed her. He hardly thought of her at all any more. He no longer mourned her absence. He was now totally consumed with the details of the building project. It’s all he thought about. It was on his mind day and night, the building of this magnificent temple.

Then one day, while hurriedly walking from one side of the construction site to the other, he accidentally bumped his leg against a

wooden box. The prince was irritated. Impatiently he brushed the dust off his leg and ordered the workers to throw the box out immediately. “What was the box doing here in the middle of the building project anyway? Get it out of here right now!”

You’ve already guessed what the box was. The box held the remains of his beloved wife. Shah had thrown out her coffin. He forgot she was there. The one the temple was built for was cast out. The one who inspired the whole project in the first place was now forgotten. The one the temple was intended to honor was harshly pushed aside, absent-mindedly thrown away. But the temple was built anyway. Isn’t that amazing?

Could someone build a temple and forget why? Could someone sculpt a tribute and forget the hero? Could someone celebrate an anniversary and forget the guest of honor? Could someone create a memorial and forget who is supposed to be remembered?

This dramatic, ancient legend is a painfully relevant parable for the way some people celebrate Christmas today. And the point is clear. Sometimes we get so involved in the tasks and the details of Christmas, that we forget the One we are honoring.

Five little words in the Gospel of Luke say it all: “No room in the inn.” There is a certain pathos in those words. “No room for you here.” That was the beginning of Jesus’ life. That was the very first thing the world said to Jesus Christ. That experience would plague him the remainder of his days on earth.

And indeed, to this very moment: “No room! We’re just too crowded. Sorry, we’re full up. No vacancy. Try again some other time. No room for you here now. So, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got a million and one things to see about. It’s too bad, but there’s just no room for you, Jesus.”

Sadly, like Shah-Jahan, we get so busy with the details of the project, we forget about the one who the project honors. Harry Emerson Fosdick once put it like this: “The crucial difficulty of Christ’s life which denied him the service he longed to render, closed him to the hearts of those he longed to change, and brought him at last to Calvary, was something so simple, and yet so familiar, and is so little recognized as a tragic evil, and is so universal among us all that one almost hesitates to mention it, is inhospitality. “No room!”

Let’s be honest now, isn’t that our problem, yours and mine? We get so busy, so tired, so preoccupied with the incessant demands on our crowded lives that we shut out the very birth of the Master we so long to know. The poet put it like this:

“O little Inn of Bethlehem,
How like we are to you.
Our lives are crowded to the brim,
With this and that to do.
We’re not unfriendly to the King,
We mean well without a doubt;
We have no hostile feeling,
We merely crowd him out.”

Won’t you let Him in this Christmas? Won’t you offer Him your warmest hospitality? Won’t you welcome Him into your life this year with open arms? Won’t you receive Him into your life as never before? Won’t you make room for Him?

Let me put it differently. Won’t you let your heart become a manger, where the Christ-Child can be born afresh in you? Remember the old story about the little boy who asked why he was a Christian? He answered, “I don’t know for sure. But I think it runs in the family.”

That's a cute story, but we need to hurriedly add a footnote. And the footnote is this: We can ride on the coat-tails of our Christian family for just so long, and then each of us, individually, has to make his or her own decision for Jesus Christ.

The family can help us here, and it's great when it does. But each of us, at some point, has to make that personal decision to receive Christ into our heart. It's terrific if Grandma or Grandpa is a devoted Christian. It's wonderful when Mom is a dedicated disciple. It's fantastic if you have or had a preacher in the family.

But somewhere along the way you have to make your own decision, your own commitment, your own acceptance of Christ as your personal Savior. Have you made that decision yet? Have you invited Him into your life? Have you made room in your heart yet for Jesus? Won't you let Him come in?

It's amazing to see how many people chase after happiness and fulfillment, and spend so much time, effort, energy and money looking in all the wrong places.

One of the right places to look is right here in Luke 2, where you will find these incredible words: "Be not afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy, which will come to all people. For to you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

You know, a lot of people will open their Christmas presents tomorrow morning, or maybe later this evening, and there will be a tremendous let down. After all the paper is off the gifts, after all the boxes have been opened, after all the batteries have been put in, and all the gadgets and gizmos plugged in and tried out, there may be some disappointment.

Because the true gift of Christmas is not found in a box. It was a baby, placed in a feed trough. The baby grew to be the man we know as Jesus. His life, his death and his resurrection is the real Christmas gift. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believed in Him would not perish, but have eternal life.

The empty feeling comes from thinking, “Is that all there is?” My dear friends that is not all there is. There is more. That something more is God’s forgiveness of our sin, and the gift of eternal life. Won’t you let Jesus into your heart this Christmas?

If you have not yet said “Yes” to Jesus Christ, this could be your best Christmas ever. Invite Him into your life. Make a decision to give your will and your life to Him. Acknowledge that you fall short of God’s high expectations, and receive the gift of grace.

Will you make room in your heart for Jesus? I pray that you will. And then you can say, “This was the best Christmas ever, the Christmas I gave my life to the Lord.” Let us pray.

This sermon borrows heavily from a sermon by the same title by Dr. James Moore.