

## **Christmas Stories**

Date: December 24, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Luke 2:1-20

Theme: Joy,

Occasion, Christmas Eve, Under Wraps series

There is no time of year like the Christmas season, when ordinary time and space are taken over by a sense of wonder and reverence and merriment. Even though Advent is often filled with busyness and activity and stress, we finally make it to tonight.

And the season of joy begins – contagious, infectious joy. That is as it should be, for Christmas is meant to be the celebration of the One who came to give us life and set us free. Now that’s a reason for joy! And no one is more joyful than God Himself, because Christmas is about God getting his kids back. What do I mean by that? A story –

In Luke 15, Jesus tells us of the Father’s joy through the story of the prodigal son, a young man who is lost and found again. Bored and restless, the young man decides to leave his home and family, burning bridges as he goes.

He goes off to lead the decadent life he desires; but in the end, worn out by his bad choices and failed dreams, he realizes that in order to survive, he must go home and beg his father for forgiveness.

Before the young man’s feet ever even hit the driveway, the father runs out to greet him; throws his arms around him and welcomes him home. The father even throws a welcome home party for his missing son. Great is the Father’s joy.

As children of God, we have all sinned and gone our own way. Beginning in the Garden, we have rejected the good things of our Father in order to pursue our own desires. Our sin separated us from

God and we couldn't make our way back to him. So God made a way for us – He sent Jesus to earth to rescue us and welcome us home as his beloved children.

On the very first Christmas Day, God was certainly joyful because He was getting his children back. From the beginning, God had a plan to rescue His children. On Christmas Day that plan was set in motion.

All of Heaven was rejoicing that day, for joy was birthed into the world! God, in the form of a tiny baby, was sent to rescue us all. Hallelujah! What a Savior! Because of God's great gift to us – God Himself, wrapped up in Jesus – we can rejoice at Christmas time at His great love for us. (*Under Wraps*, Nashville, TN, 2014, pp. 83-85)

Max Lucado, from his book *God Came Near*, describes Jesus' birth this way – “It all happened in a moment, a most remarkable moment. As moments go, that one appeared no different than any other. But in reality, that particular moment was like none other.

For through that segment of time, a spectacular thing occurred. God became man. the creatures of earth walked unaware, Divinity arrived. Heaven opened herself and placed her most precious one in a human womb.

God as a fetus; Holiness sleeping in a womb; The Creator of life being created: God was given eyebrows, elbows, two kidneys and a spleen. He stretched against the walls and floated in the amniotic fluid of his mother. – God had come near.

He came, not as a flash of light, or as an unapproachable conqueror, but as one whose first cries were heard by a peasant girl

and a sleepy carpenter. The hands that first held him were unmanicured, calloused, and dirty. No silk, no ivory, no hype.

Were it not for the shepherds, there would have been no reception. And were it not for a group of star-gazers, there would have been no gifts.

To think of Jesus in such a light is, well, it seems almost irreverent, doesn't it? It's not something we like to do; it's uncomfortable. It is much easier to keep the humanity out of the Incarnation.

Clean the manure from around the manger. Wipe the sweat out of his eyes. Pretend he never snored, or blew his nose, or hit his hand with a hammer.

But don't do it. For Heaven's sake, don't. Let him be as human as he intended to be. Let him *into* the mire and muck of our world. For only if we let him in can he pull us out." (Max Lucado, *God Came Near*, 2004)

Christmas – the season of joy, as we celebrate a Savior who pulls us out of the mire and muck. You see, Christmas is the birth of our Savior, who promised to be with us always. Another story -

"In 1994, two Americans answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach in Russia. They were invited to teach at many places, including a large orphanage. About 100 boys and girls who had been abandoned, abused and left in the care of a government-run program were in the orphanage.

I'll let the two American educators tell their own story: 'It was nearing the holiday season, 1994, time for our orphans to hear, for

the first time, the traditional story of Christmas. We told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem.

Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger. Throughout the story, the children and the orphanage staff sat in amazement as they listened.

Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word. After finishing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small paper square, cut from yellow napkins I had brought with me. No colored paper was available in the city.

Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid strips in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel, cut from a worn-out nightgown an American lady was throwing away as she left Russia, were used for the baby's blanket. A doll-like baby was cut from tan felt we had brought from the United States.

The orphans were busy assembling their manger as I walked among them to see if they needed any help. All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat. He looked to be about 6 years old. He had already finished his project.

As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger. Quickly I called for the translator to ask why there were two babies in the manger. Crossing his arms in front of him, and looking at his completed manger scene, the child began to repeat the story very seriously.

For such a young boy, who had only heard the Christmas story once, he related the happenings accurately – until he came to part

where Mary put the Baby Jesus in the manger. Then Misha started to ad-lib. He made up his own ending to the story by saying,

‘And when Maria laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no mamma and I have no papa, so I don’t have any place to stay.’

Then Jesus told me I could stay with Him. But I told him I couldn’t because I didn’t have a gift to give Him like everyone else. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept Him warm, that would be a good gift.

So I asked Jesus, ‘If I keep *You* warm, will that be a good enough gift?’ And Jesus told me, ‘If you keep *Me* warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me.’

So, I got into the manger and then Jesus looked at me and told me I could stay with him – for always.’

As little Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that splashed down his little cheeks. Putting his hand over his face, his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed.

The little orphan had found someone who would never abandon him nor abuse him. Someone who would stay with him – for always!”

“Two Babes in Manger (not what you may think)” ~ Author Anonymous, email story.

I’ve learned over the years, it’s not *what* you have in your life, but *who* you have in your life that counts.

Do you have Jesus in your life? Invite him into your hearts this Christmas. Unwrap God’s greatest gift. And may you know the joy of the season.

Joy to the world! The Lord is come!" Merry Christmas! Amen.