

## “The Manger”

Date: December 28, 2014      Text: Luke 2:8-20

Occasion: Christmas 1, series, The Journey

Theme: Bread of Life, spiritual hunger

I hope you have been enjoying this sermon series, taken from Adam Hamilton’s book *The Journey*. I’ve enjoyed sharing with you the insights that help us to better understand the geography, the history, and the people who participated in this great historical event.

Before we leave the Christmas season, let’s return to Luke’s account of the Christmas story and his mention of **the manger**. Adam Hamilton, once again, sheds new light on a familiar part of the story.

After Jesus was born, he was placed in a manger. Jesus slept that first night in *a feeding trough*. Most of us recognize the humility that is represented in this aspect of the story. But Rev. Hamilton helps us to see something new.

He writes in his book: “I don’t know how I missed it before. But this year I noticed that Luke mentions the manger three times. In Luke 2:7, we’re told that the child was laid in a manger. Then, in Luke 2:12, the angel announces to the shepherds that the Christ was born and “this will be a sign to you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying a manger.”

Then again, in Luke 2:16 we read, the shepherds found the child “lying in a manger.” Then he says, “I began to see that perhaps the manger was not only a sign to the *shepherds*, but for *us* as well. The manger, or the feeding trough, is not just a sign of Jesus’ humility

A feeding trough is where God’s creatures come to eat. This is a sign *to us*. Pay attention! It’s a detail that Luke includes to point

toward something greater. Moses said, “One does not live by bread alone.” Deuteronomy 8:3. By that, Moses meant there was something deeper that we hunger for.

Isaiah the prophet once asked, “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” (Isaiah 55:2) Isaiah was pointing, along with Moses, to a deeper hunger we have as human beings, but also to our tendency to spend money and to work hard for that which cannot ultimately satisfy our hunger.

I believe Jesus had these two prophets and these two verses in mind when he said, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35)

At the Last Supper, Jesus took the bread and said, “This is my body, which is given for you.” And when we take and eat the bread during communion, we are reminded: “Take, eat, and feed upon *Him* by faith, with thanksgiving.”

He who called himself the bread of life, *who alone* can satisfy the deepest longings of our souls, was born in the town of Bethlehem. Do you remember what “Bethlehem” means? It means *The House of Bread*. And Jesus was laid to sleep on that first night, in a feed trough where God’s creatures ate. Powerful symbolism!

What we really hunger for will not be found under the tree on Christmas morning. We hunger for meaning, for joy, for hope in the face of despair. We hunger to know that we can be forgiven and start anew, after things we regret. We hunger for a love that will not let us go, and for life and triumph in the face of death.

*These* come through a baby born in a stable, laid to sleep in a feed trough, and visited by night-shift shepherds. He is for us the bread of life. And we must come to the stable to satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts.

I invite you to come to the manger this Christmas season, and to eat of this bread. I invite you to choose to become a Christ follower, and to put your trust in him. John tells us that “all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” (1:12)

Christmas is the perfect time to call out to God and to his son, Jesus Christ and to pray. I invite all of you to join with me in this prayer. Perhaps this will be the first time you have prayed such a prayer. Maybe you’ve prayed prayers like this many times before. But it never hurts to rededicate our lives to Christ. Will you pray with me?

“Jesus, I come to you, like the shepherds and magi did so long ago. I accept you as my King, my Savior, and my Lord. Forgive me the ways I’ve turned from God’s path, and help me to follow you.

Save me from myself, and help me to live for you. I receive you, Jesus Christ, and believe in your name. Make me your child, and bring me your joy. Help me to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with you. In your name I pray. Amen.”

What a wonderful Christmas gift you have just given yourself: A new life, a new start, a new beginning. If this is the first time you’ve prayed a prayer like this, I’d like to speak to you after the service. I hope you’ll let me know that you’ve decided to follow Jesus, and allow Him to be your Bread of Life. Amen.

Adapted from Adam Hamilton’s book *The Journey*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011, pp.127-9.