### “Compassion for Others” by Steve Finlan at The First Church, Dec. 24, 2021

**Luke 2:7**

7Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Welcome to our Christmas Eve service. Christmas celebrates the birth of our Savior, Joshua ben Joseph, or Jesus of Nazareth, as he would be known.

The birth of Jesus was unexpectedly humble, on the human level. They went to an inn in Bethlehem, but were turned away, and evidently had to make use of a barnyard. Mary laid him in a feeding trough. In the spiritual realm, there were angels singing, but on the physical level, Mary and Joseph had to huddle around a feeding trough, occasionally rocking the baby and trying to keep each other warm. They will soon be visited by magi, priests from the East, but for a few nights, presumably, they are by themselves. And I imagine they behaved much as new parents do: looking after each other’s comfort, but especially after the baby’s comfort. Apparently the baby was quite healthy. He will soon be going on a trip all the way to Egypt, after Joseph has a dream warning him of Herod’s murderous intentions towards the baby born in Bethlehem (Matt 2:13), for his scribes had told him that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (Matt 2:4–6). There is no mention of any health issues for the baby, or for the parents, on the trip or while they hid out in Egypt, returning to Judah only after Herod had died.

My point is that Jesus was cared for as any child would be by loving parents. And when there was a threat of political violence, they fled as they needed to do, until the danger had passed. For a period, they were refugees in a foreign country. Then they moved to Galilee, again to avoid the dangers of a violent ruler, in this case from Archelaus, son of Herod (Matt 2:22).

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph had to live in dangerous times, without many advantages. I have many times spoken about how Jesus had to live a difficult earth life that had many of the same problems and limitations that everyone else has to face. Here, we see that this goes all the way back to the situation surrounding his birth. He was born in a barnyard, or something similar; his parents had to flee for their lives from a tyrant, then move strategically to avoid another tyrant. Then he grew up as a builder in a Galilean town with a population probably under 1,000 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazareth). Evidently his father died while he was still a child, and Jesus may have had to help guide and support the remaining family, his brothers and sisters. I imagine money was tight.

As Hebrews wrote, Jesus “in every respect has been tested as we are” (Heb 4:15). “He had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect” (2:17). When we hear about miracles and angels and so on, we often forget that he endured what most others have to endure—and more. “Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested,” Hebrews says (2:18). He was tested by danger and hardship and a feeling of national weakness, which the Jews had at that time. He did not grow up in a cushy environment, or privileged in any way. Maybe this contributed to his ability to feel so much compassion for others. This is one of the most characteristic features of the adult Jesus: his compassion. As he said, even on the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Jesus understands a life of struggle and hardship. He understands what people go through. He sympathizes with our weaknesses (Heb 4:15). He receives us graciously. “Come to me,” he says, “all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28).