

Christ Community Covenant Church
What do you love about Christmas? / I love having family around!
"Tampering with a Masterpiece!"
Pastor Dave Scherrer – December 9, 2012

It is never a good idea to tamper with a masterpiece. A person ought not to tamper with a masterpiece. Kids are always a masterpiece. They are a work of art. I want to make sure I don't distract us from the innocent faith on display this morning. But there is another masterpiece we should look at. It is recorded in the second chapter of the gospel of Luke.

Luke 2:1-13

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Tampering with a Masterpiece

While I don't want to tamper with the story, I would like to help you see some things in the story that you might not have ever heard. I think it will simply make the masterpiece even more amazing. Let's look at one verse from the story together.

Luke 2:7

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

It kind of surprises me that the Bible doesn't give more details than this about the birth of Christ. We have the account of the Angel talking to Mary. And then in the Matthew account we read that the angel talked to Joseph too. That story states that Joseph took Mary as "his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS." Then we read here of the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the pregnant couple. The following chapter discusses the visit of the Magi some time later and the escape to Egypt. That's it. Not much to go on. That is why it is important to be clear on it. There is lot of myth that has slipped into the Christmas story.

We have this idea of the night of the first Christmas . . . [retold]. I don't think that is quite how it happened

First, the Bible certainly teaches that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but it does not state that Joseph and Mary arrived in that town *just in time* for her to deliver. In fact, this scenario is highly unlikely since it is doubtful that the two would attempt to make the arduous 70 mile trip from Nazareth in the final stages of her pregnancy. This story in Luke implies that they were in Bethlehem for a while before Jesus was born - "while they were there, the days were completed".

Second, the Bible makes no mention of any innkeeper who told them that the inn was full for the night. We have had it out for this innkeeper for 2000 years and I don't even think there was an innkeeper. The reason we imagine this scenario is because the translators of most English versions have chosen the word "inn" to translate the Greek word *kataluma* which gives modern readers the wrong impression. Jesus used this same Greek word in Luke 22 (verse 11) to refer to a "guest room." This room is now known as the Upper Room—the scene of the Last Supper, the meal that Jesus ate with His disciples the night before His Crucifixion.

You see the common name for an 'Inn' – a place where you would rent a room for the night is *pandocheion*. That is not the word used in this story. It is *kataluma* which is "guest room."

***Pandocheion* or "Inn"**
***Kataluma* or "Guest Room"**

The word for Inn was used by Luke in when he wrote about the Good Samaritan who took the beaten man to the "inn" (*pandocheion*) and paid the "innkeeper" (*pandochei*) to care for the man.

The probable answer is that Joseph and Mary did not attempt to stay at an inn. The Bible states that there was no room for them in the *kataluma*, which would be better translated as "guest room."

Joseph and Mary returned to Joseph's ancestral home of Bethlehem because of the census. As the census was proclaimed throughout the Roman Empire, many Jewish families would have needed to travel to Bethlehem during this time and lodged with relatives who lived in the town.

Joseph and Mary probably stayed with Joseph's relatives in Bethlehem, but because of the large influx of people, the house would have been crowded and the *kataluma* (guest room) was full. Consequently, Joseph and Mary would have been relegated to living in the lower level of the house. It is hard to believe that pregnant Mary would have been turned away from a relative's home in a society that greatly valued familial ties.

Archaeologists have excavated first century homes from the Judean hill country. They have discovered that the upper level served as a guest chamber while the lower level served as the living and dining rooms. Oftentimes, the more vulnerable animals would be brought in at night to protect them from the cold and theft. This sounds strange to many of us, since we wouldn't dream of bringing some of our cattle into the house at night, but even today in some countries of Europe (e.g., Germany and Austria), the farmhouse and the animal quarters are often different parts of the same building.

This is where the manger comes into play. Mary likely gave birth to Jesus in the lower level of a crowded house, in which some of the animals had been brought in for the night. She then wrapped Jesus in swaddling cloths and laid Him in the manger (feeding trough).

Ok so what does all this mean? Except that I am maybe ruining a romantic story. We won't ever know exactly what happened but with this understanding here are three things we can keep in mind:

1. Christmas all around the world has always been about hospitality and family.

Family has been gathering for Christmas since the very first Christmas. I know that for many of us, family isn't always all that fun. But I think perhaps what God is saying is somehow let family be a gift this year. I know you can't choose your family but God chose your family for you. Best to make the best of it. Celebrate family this Christmas.

2. The meaning of the Story of hasn't changed

There is a good Christmas verse that we should all be aware of. You won't find it in the accounts of Jesus' birth though. We know the answers to the Christmas questions of "who" "what" and "where". This verse I am going to share with you answers the "why" of Christmas:

1 Timothy 1:15a

"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners . . ."

Jesus is the gift of God to the world. Jesus came to save us from the consequence of our sins and to give us a Way to find peace with God. It is God breaking through human history and changing its course back to Himself instead of the deathly drift away from Him. Have you received this gift? It's Christmas . . . you should take this gift home with you. Peace with God through Jesus Christ our Savior.

The last point is a little like the second.

3. Refusing to take Him in is the same as choosing to reject Him

John 12:28 (the Message)

"If anyone hears what I am saying and doesn't take it seriously, I don't reject him. I didn't come to reject the world; I came to save the world. But you need to know that whoever puts me off, refusing to take in what I'm saying, is willfully choosing rejection.

There was room that night in a crowded home, a home with cousins and second cousins. They could have sent him away but they didn't. But to say "Sorry, I like you and you have a lot to offer but not right now, maybe later" doesn't float with God.

You either accept Jesus or you don't. The choice is to take the gift of God's love home with you and make it yours. Or not. But there is no middle ground with this present.

All around the world children and Christ Followers gather at Christmas rejoicing over the birth of Christ. Families are gathering and forgiving one another and enjoying one another. You know what I love about Christmas; the love of family.

Let's repeat this anthem together written by Augustine almost 1600 years ago. It still has so much meaning today:

Let the just rejoice,
for their justifier is born.
Let the sick and infirm rejoice,
For their savior is born.

Let the captives rejoice,
For their Redeemer is born.
Let slaves rejoice,
for their Master is born.

Let free men rejoice,
For their Liberator is born.
Let All Christians rejoice,
For Jesus Christ is born.

St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-440)