

CHRISTMAS FOR THE POOR



The time came for Mary to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son.

She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and said “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord.”

In Luke’s Gospel, these two scenes of the birth of Jesus Christ form the central message of the beginning of Chapter Two (which threads throughout Luke’s story): His birth in a manger and the first recipients – the shepherds – of this glorious news. With the exception of the angel of the Lord, each character in this story is POOR.

I appreciate the easy mantra that “Jesus is the reason for the season.” It reminds me that the Advent focus of consumer frenzy and debt accumulation is a manifestation of our erroneous belief that material goods wrapped in colored paper and ribbon are an adequate substitute for love, friendship, and goodwill to all.

Christmas is our yearly opportunity to express gratitude for the first coming of Jesus Christ. It is a time to share our joy that God so loves us to send his only son.

Christmas is also the season to acknowledge the special place the poor occupy in the Church: Mary gave birth to her firstborn son *and* laid him in a manger. The angel of the Lord proclaimed the birth of the savior *to the shepherds in the fields*. These are not throw-away lines, gratuitous details merely added to Luke’s account of Jesus’s birth to engage the reader or lengthen the story. These details exist because of the centrality of the poor to our Christian faith.

If Luke does not make this clear enough for us in the Christmas story, we can turn to the stories of the Loaves and Fishes. If the message of this event escapes us, we can reread the Last Judgment; Jesus very clearly tells us what is expected of us: to serve the least of our brothers and sisters. The Last Judgment is our final exam and we have been given the answers in advance: serve the least of our brothers and sisters.

Our consciences – formed in Truth by the faith – provide the guideposts while we discern how best to serve our poor brothers and sisters. Our neighbors. We know, however, where our journeys begin: in Bethlehem, in a manger, where Mary’s firstborn was laid. We know this to be true because the angel of the Lord announced this to the shepherds, the lowest form of labor in Israel.

Jesus is the reason for the season: to remind us in no uncertain terms that salvation comes through Jesus and our commitment to the poor and vulnerable.

What can you do?

- Give to or volunteer at an organization listed in the [Christmas Giving Guide](#)
- Commit to a regular practice of living the [Works of Mercy](#)

(Readings for Christmas Day)