
Christmas Eve Mass
Monsignor Harry Posner
Christ the Good Shepherd, ORCC
December 24, 2018

The Christmas story is something with which most of us are familiar. We learned it as children. We know it so well that most of us could recite it ourselves. Yet every year, at Christmas, we gather to listen to the story one more time, to celebrate the joy of God becoming flesh and dwelling among us. We gather to welcome the new born King into our lives once again, to recall the beginning of our salvation history. Tonight is truly a joyous night for we celebrate God's deep and abiding love for all creation.

Now, on the surface, the creation story sounds like a sweet story about a young couple, Mary and Joseph, having a baby in a manger, surrounded by animals and, at the urging of an angel, shepherds who came to greet the new born king. But, Luke gives us some important details that are easy to miss. Tonight, I want to spend some time unpacking this story.

The first detail for us to unwrap is Jesus was born into utter poverty. In fact, the early days of Jesus' life was that of a migrant family fleeing violence and relying on others for mercy and compassion. Jesus wasn't even given the dignity of being born in a house or sterile environment; but rather, he was born in a barn with animals and laid in their feeding trough. But, God didn't mind being born in such conditions. God didn't care what people thought. God was comfortable with occupying the bottom of the social scale, with living on the margins of society. The humble birth of our Savior was a precursor to the life he would not only lead, but expect of his followers.

Secondly, the birth of Jesus wasn't announced to the town mayor or the religious leaders, or the wealthy and influential. But rather, the angel appeared to shepherds to announce the good news of salvation. While that may sound sweet to us, but in the mindset of the time, shepherds occupied the absolute bottom of the social scale. They couldn't even enter the temple to pray, yet God choose them to be the first to come and worship. Think about that, those who were not welcomed in the temple, or in today's words, the church, were chosen to be the first to worship God in the flesh. What a powerful message for us to ponder.

The last detail I want to look at is the message of the angel. The angel 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 who is Christ the Lord." This message is packed with power. At the time, the chosen people believed that God's love was reserved for them alone. They alone shared a special relationship with God. Yet, the angel threw open the door and announced good news for **ALL PEOPLE**. God's love, God's birth, was for everyone, without exception.

What we can learn from this beautiful story is that God came to earth to shake things up, to open the door of salvation for all people. There is no room in God's house for an "us verses them" mentality. In God's kingdom all people are equal and equally loved. There is no such thing as the worthy or unworthy.

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We have a God who is comfortable with chaos. God does not care how dirty our hands are or if we have tattered clothes. God does not care about how much money we have or our education level or whether we are documented or undocumented. God does not care about our reputation, about who we love or how we identify. God invites all of us to enter God's house. God invites all of us to worship, to love, and to enter the journey of faith. God cares about those who are rejected or deemed unworthy, those who suffer, those who go with out, those who seek safety and shelter. God hears the cry of the poor, the oppressed, God hears those in need and challenges us to respond as the shepherds responded to the message of the angel. God choose to be born in poverty, to challenge our way of thinking, to help us see that the path of salvation begins and ends with love for all people.

This beautiful story challenges each of us to hold our heads high with the knowledge that we are worthy, we are loved, we are chosen, we are called God's daughters and sons. That is the joy of Christmas. God loved us so much that God became one of us to lead us home, to lead us on our journey of faith, to give us the courage to accept the unconditional love that only God can give. This story should challenge our way of thinking about ourselves and other people. God welcomes us and invites us to enter the temple whether we find ourselves worthy or not.

As we leave here today, let God's unconditional love infuse us with joy, with hope, with peace, and with love. God came to bring us salvation. Never ever believe you are unworthy or unloved. Never look at another person believing they are unworthy of our love, our respect, and our compassion. Christ's birth was meant to announce salvation for **ALL PEOPLE**, and that includes you and me.

Merry Christmas!