

## **Luke 2:1-20**

*2*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. *2*This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. *3*All went to their own towns to be registered. *4*Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. *5*He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. *6*While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. *7*And she 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.

*8*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. *9*Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. *10*But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: *11*to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. *12*This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” *13*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, *14*“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” *15*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” *16*So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. *17*When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; *18*and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. *19*But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. *20*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

There is a story told about a Christmas pageant that was done in a tiny church. The part of the innkeeper was played by a boy in high school. He was a shy and pleasant boy, but the kind of boy who fit the description for “awkward.” He was awkward with the way he carried himself; awkward around girls; even awkward in his size – he was tall and lanky and his clothes never seemed to fit right.

He was liked well enough by his fellow students, but he never really stood out in a crowd. This boy was easy to overlook. And so during the Christmas pageant, when Joseph and Mary appeared at the inn, he stood...awkwardly...slouching just a bit as the couple made their request for a place to stay.

He then responded by saying what he was supposed to say, “There is no room in the inn.” But this boy then had a few other words to say to them. As Mary and Joseph turned and walked wearily away toward the barn where they would spend the night, the boy continued to watch them. His eyes were filled with compassion. Suddenly, responding to a grace which filled that moment, he startled himself, the holy couple, and the audience, by calling, “Wait a minute. Don’t go. You can have my room.”<sup>1</sup>

And maybe that is why those Christmas pageants in our fellowship halls, sanctuaries and basements probably capture the Christmas story the best.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Long, p.45, “Something is About to Happen”

The gospel of Luke is all about what happens to common people in a world that is dark and then suddenly the glory of the Lord is revealed. Like the characters in Luke, the players in these pageants are common. Common children and basic costumes, normal forgotten lines and stage fright and funny bloopers.

But what a story they tell. In all that is common about a Christmas pageant, an extraordinary story comes through. In all that is commonplace about a quiet night, an extraordinary moment occurs. The Christmas program reveals God coming to earth as an infant. That quiet night reveals to us that the world will no longer be silent.

God meets us. God is revealed to us. Through a compassionate high school student who plays the part of the innkeeper. God is revealed to us. Through a baby Mary and Joseph called Jesus.

Max Lucado says it best in his book, "The Glory of Christmas." He writes, "There is one word that describes the night he came--ordinary.

The sky was ordinary. An occasional gust stirred the leaves and chilled the air. The stars were diamonds sparkling on black velvet.

The sheep were ordinary. Some fat. Some scrawny. Common animals. No history makers. No blue-ribbon winners.

And the shepherds. Peasants they were. Probably wearing all the clothes they owned. Smelling like sheep and looking just as woolly.

An ordinary night with ordinary sheep and ordinary shepherds. And were it not for a God who loves to hook an "extra" on the front of the ordinary, the night would have gone unnoticed. The sheep would have been forgotten, and the shepherds would have slept the night away.

But God dances amidst the common. And that night he did a waltz.

The black sky exploded with brightness. Trees that had been shadows jumped into clarity. Sheep that had been silent became a chorus of curiosity. One minute the shepherd was dead asleep; the next he was rubbing his eyes and staring into the face of an alien.

The night was ordinary no more.

The announcement went first to the shepherds. Had the angel gone to the theologians, they would have first consulted their commentaries. Had he gone to the elite, they would have looked around to see if anyone was watching.

So he went to the shepherds. Men who didn't know enough to tell God that angels don't sing to sheep and that messiahs aren't found wrapped in rags and sleeping in a feed trough."

God didn't come for the perfect. God didn't come for those of us who have it all together...for those of us who can go through life on our own. God came for the clumsy. For the meek. For the frightened and for the lost. God came as the most helpless of all creatures – an infant - to show us that we need not be rich or famous or special for God to love us.

And isn't it funny, that these little Christmas pageants that we have year after year, appear to be so mediocre compared to what really happened that night? What if we tried to re-create here, the spectacular events that unfolded the night Jesus was born?

To begin with, it could start off pretty simple. Just some shepherds resting on a Judean hillside, watching their flocks

of sheep. Our shepherds could just be standing over to the side here, tending to a few of the younger children wearing sheep ears.

But then, what would we do next? How would we portray the next scenes that play out? Suddenly the scene is filled with the light of glory. This light of glory is beyond anything we can ever imagine. How would we portray that? No lights we have could do that. We'd have to have a million deer shining lights in here for that!

And then there is one angel, and then another and another, until there becomes a heavenly host, and the shepherds become terrified. We'd have to have 500 people playing the part of angels, strung up on our ceiling, singing the most beautiful music you have ever heard in order to recreate that event! And that wouldn't even do justice to how it really happened.

Maybe the point isn't to see how spectacular we can make our Christmas pageants. Maybe that's why that awkward teenaged boy makes such a moving point that we all can learn from: Decorations and costumes and technology isn't what Christmas is about. Christmas is about greeting the baby Jesus with an open heart. It is about believing that God has done a wonderful and special thing by coming down into our world.

It is about wanting, like that awkward boy, to make room for a Savior to be born. Only for us, the savior will be born in our hearts. What in your life needs that newly born savior? Where are you hurting the most? What needs to change for you this year?

Remember what we are told, "With God anything is possible!" With God, we can be comforted in our grief. With God, we can overcome depression. With God, we can pursue long-held dreams. With God, we can reach out to serve others in ways we never imagined.

I pray that each one of us can be like that teenaged boy...because his heart was moved with the gift of Christmas. May each one of us, in our own awkward ways, be filled with the gift of grace that came in the form of a baby. Amen.