

December 10, 2006 – Second Sunday of Advent

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

Advent plan in Preacher's Magazine 2006 – Adapted from message by: Dr. S. Estep

The Sounds of Christmas

Luke 2:1-20

Play the clip of some sounds of Christmas.

Read: Luke 2:1-3 - Sing, “Do you hear what I hear?”

I think I hear in the story of the first Christmas some sounds that aren't just cuddly and cozy. **Reread vv. 1-2.** You know what Mary, Joseph, and everyone else who came from Bethlehem were going home to do? They weren't going to visit family for the holidays. This was a government-dictated homecoming, and they were all going there to pay taxes. “The census was to ascertain the income, property, and wealth of the inhabitants for purposes of taxation.”¹

For Mary and Joseph, this decree meant a 90-mile trip to pay taxes. Can you imagine a 90-mile trek with a woman nine months pregnant? I can't even get to the Mall in the luxury of a automobile without getting yelled at for something. Did you hear the sound of the first Christmas? I can imagine the travelers Mary and Joseph walked alongside or came across on their journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. They may have all been less than thrilled about making such a long trip so the government could take their piece of these people's net worth. Just imagine having to walk or ride a donkey for three days to get to the line at the DMV. Do any of you enjoy going to the Department of Motor Vehicles for any reason? I think only those who work there are enthusiastic about going there. Actually, I think the workers at the DMV are sentenced to work there for some non-violent crime they have committed. If you want to go to a place where you're guaranteed to see scowls and come across unhappy people, just go there. Think about your wonderful experiences going to register or pay taxes for your vehicle, and now think what it would be like if, instead of everyone going on different months of the year, everyone in Patchogue/Medford had to go to the same office all at the same time to take turns registering. Would that put you in a festive mood or what?

I think as I listen to the sounds of the first Christmas, one of the sounds I hear is the **sound of complaining**. Has anyone ever worked in a retail store —let's say in the customer service area? Yeah - One of the sounds I think of when it comes to Christmas is the sound of complaining.

You hear it too, don't you? The sound of complaining. Complaining about prices and credit cards, crowds and family obligations. There's the traffic and the holiday shopping drivers, the congestion in the stores and the long check-out lines. Then you finally find what you were looking for and buy it – then the next week it's on sale and you have to return it for a refund – and there's the exchange and returns. I don't imagine the sounds of this Christmas will be entirely different than the sounds of the first one. One of the sounds of Christmas is the **sound of complaints**.

Read: Luke 2:4-7

Do you hear what I hear?

Another sound I hear ringing from this story of the first Christmas is the **sound of rejection**. “Very sorry, no room.”

No room for Jesus. Unfortunately, the sound of rejection is still being heard at Christmas 2,000 years later. Just about every Christmas we hear stories on the news about where Nativity scenes are and are not allowed. We hear about Christmas songs that are actually about Christ being banned. Over and over again, it’s the sound of rejection. “Very sorry, no room.” It’s as if our culture has re-written and renamed the songs of this season “Away With the Manger,” and “Be Silent about the Night.”

Hearing the sound of rejection in the story is not to cast the innkeeper as a horrible person. He may have been a wonderful guy who felt terrible about the situation and would have loved to ask someone else to give up their room. What kind of guy he was really doesn’t matter because the end result was the same. The sound that came from that inn was the sound of rejection. There was no room for Jesus.

It’s unfortunate that the sound of rejection was heard at the inn. It’s unfortunate that the sound of rejection is still heard in Christmas parades and public arenas. But it’s tragic that, “Very sorry, no room,” is the sound Jesus hears coming from people like us. When we gather with our families for giving gifts without ever mentioning the Savior or His story, He hears it all over again: “Very sorry, no room.”

When we refuse to give Jesus any space in our checkbooks and in our financial set-up, He hears it all over again: “Very sorry, no room.”

When Jesus wants to be included in our plans for the future, our dating decisions and life choices, He hears it all over again: “Very sorry, no room.”

When Jesus is not allowed to enter the decisions we make about how we spend our time and use our talents, and we refuse to let Him have a say in our schedules, He hears it all over again: “Very sorry, no room.”

When He stands at the door of our heart wanting to come in, forgive our sin, lead our lives in such a way that every area of our life is affected by Him, and we reject His invitation, He hears it all over again: “Very sorry, no room.”

If you think about your life lately, can you relate to not have room enough for Jesus? As you look around can you almost hear the people saying it – maybe not with words, but with their actions and their lives? “Very Sorry, No Room.”

It doesn’t have to be this way. Jesus has come and is waiting to come again. His coming was an act of God’s love for you and me. Advent means – coming. During this season we anticipate the Second Advent and celebrate the first. Jesus came for everyone. Have you made room for Him in your life? Jesus’ coming was supposed to make an every-day difference for all of us. Why isn’t everyone in church worshipping and giving thanks?

Read: Luke 2:8-16

Do you hear what I hear?

Finally some good news! Not everyone in this sacred story complained or rejected. We also hear the sound of rejoicing by the shepherds. They sought and found the Savior, but not until being sought and found by messengers from the Savior. I think the pattern here holds true today. They pursued Jesus after finding out Jesus was already pursuing them. It's part of the message of Christmas. Long before any of us ever pursued or sought after God, God was seeking after us. This is what we call prevenient grace. If you don't know Him as your Savior, He's seeking you, coming to the door of your heart, waiting to see if He'll be welcomed. Every human being has the opportunity to recognize the Savior of the world, Jesus the Christ. We can choose to accept Him or not.

I think it's awesome the first ones invited to see the Savior weren't kings or diplomats or the most influential people God could find. They were people like us. Ordinary, working-class, run-of-the-mill kinds of people. I love that whenever God encounters humanity in the various ways that this occurs, His message to us is always first – “Do not be afraid.” The awesomeness of God causes us mere earthlings to fear – as the shepherds did. Verse nine tells us they were “filled with fear.” But the message to them and to us is, “Fear not – don't be afraid.” God's love is so wonderful, so abundant, and so real that we need not fear his “coming.”

Luke tells them in v. 11 that a Savior is born for them and for us. He purposely uses this term or Savior. In Jesus is the true salvation of God. In the old covenant, God came to His people through Moses and brought about a great salvation for Israel. The term meant a freeing from slavery and oppression and inheritance of the land. In the new covenant God visits His people and offers salvation made through Jesus. This salvation is a redemption from sins leading to the capacity of worshiping God without fear because of the inheritance of the Holy Spirit. What God did symbolically in the O.T., He does in actuality in the N.T. through His coming in the person of Jesus the Savior of the world.

Rejoicing—it's the sound we hear from the shepherds. It's the sound at Christmas time, and the rest of the year too, that comes from people who have found Jesus, the Savior. The host of heaven rejoiced about this event. They had the inside scoop. They knew this was God come to earth in the person of Jesus. There was much to rejoice about. When the angels left, the shepherds took action. It not enough to hear the message about the Savior and have the grace of God available or us to make a decision about Jesus, we have to do something about it. The Shepherds said, **“Let us go ... and see.”** They took action and did something about what they heard. Acting in faith, they found the Savior just as they were told. We have to act in faith and do something about this message we have been told. We have to ask God in faith to have Jesus come into our lives and become our Savior personally. When we do, we will find that it is exactly as He said it would be. We receive new life and forgiveness of sin.

Joy is something every heart longs for and what every person was designed by God to possess. We need joy; we thrive on joy; and inner joy is what Jesus came to earth to give us. It's an inner joy in spite of circumstances. It's a joy of knowing you're in the center of God's will and in a relationship with the Creator and Savior of the world. It's a joy like the shepherds had. We need to have something to rejoice about no matter what. We have this joy because Jesus came to us. It's the story of Advent – it's the sound of Christmas.

READ: 2:17-20 - Proclaiming the Good News – The shepherds told others about this great event they had witnessed. It's only natural. When you experience something great, you want to tell everyone. (**Nicky Gumbel story**) Jesus is the Savior, the Messiah. They heard about Him, they believed, and they experienced. When this happens in our own lives, we go away rejoicing and glorifying and praising God (v. 20).

I guess the sounds of the first Christmas weren't all that different from the sounds of this Christmas. Sounds of complaining, rejecting, and rejoicing. I'm hoping there will be a lot more rejoicing than complaining, or rejecting. What's it going to be for you? The angels said the joy; the good news was to be for all people, a Savior for you (vs. 10-11). That includes you—if you'll make room for Him.

Invitation

So, what does Christmas sound like to you? What has Jesus become to you in the hustle and bustle of our modern day Christmas? Is it the sound of complaining as you try to make it through another Christmas season of shopping and visiting and other obligatory commitments that just drive you crazy? Is it the sound of rejection because there just isn't enough time in the day or room in your life for Jesus the Savior? Or – is it the sound of rejoicing because you dared to take God at His word and not only hear the message, but do something about it? Joy is more than a seasonal song. It is a daily experience. It is something that only is possible when we acknowledge Jesus, the Savior who came to us to give the gift of forgiveness and inner joy and peace with God.

Have you taken that one important step in all this and asked Jesus to come to you this Advent and make His home with you? Have you realized that Jesus has slid back into the noise of the Christmas rush and all the other obligations that we all have to deal with? Or – have you decided that you would rather not deal with any of this at this point in your life. After all, you just wanted to attend church this Advent season like you do every – you know – it makes you feel like you did your duty to God and country and all that. What will your answer be to the Savior, Jesus Christ? Will it be, "Sorry, no room?" or will it be "Come to me Lord Jesus – forgive me and make me whole?" Deep down, the answer to every human need can be summed up in one word – **Jesus**. Joy is a byproduct of meeting and accepting this Jesus of whom the angels sang.

Benediction:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

1 Craig Evans, Luke, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 35.