



## No Crib For A Bed

2014 Advent Sermons:  
Miracle on Manger Street<sup>1</sup>  
Galatians 4:4-7, Luke 2:1-7

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Holy Communion

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Galatians 4:4-7  
New International Version

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba<sup>3</sup> (AH-buh), Father”. So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Luke 2:1-7  
New International Version

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him

in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

The Word of the Lord:  
Thanks be to God!

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Very soon, if not already, in houses and churches all over the world, we will be getting out the Christmas decorations. Among them, for sure, will be a creche (kresh), or manger scene, complete with figures of Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, a manger, various animals, shepherds, the magi<sup>4</sup>, and possibly some bits of very clean straw.

The creche will occupy a special place and it will be a meaningful part of our Christmas season, a very peaceful, inspiring, and comforting part of our Christmas season. But if you and I were to travel back in time, to Bethlehem on that night Jesus was born, we would discover it was not as clean and not as peaceful as we portray it today.

Where a baby is born is very important to parents, of course. Mothers and fathers carefully choose the place of birth based on the good reputation of the facility ~ be it a hospital or a birthing center ~ and no parent would deliberately choose any place as unclean as a stable.

So why did God choose that lowly, unsanitary, humble place for his own Son to be born and not provide even a proper crib for his bed? We could even ask the proverbial question: What is wrong with this picture?

Part of what is wrong with this picture is that the inn had no room for the holy family. Yes, the innkeeper has taken lots of criticism and blame over the centuries, but he may have actually done Mary and Joseph a small favor by giving them at least a little privacy. We all know, of course that the term “inn” does not mean “Holiday Inn” as we know it today. In fact, probably in the entire Roman Empire there was not a single travelers’ inn that would have

been as nice and clean as even the most humble motel of today.

And that is where Jesus was born. Not in a warm and clean house, not in a stately palace, but in a stable, lying in a feeding trough.

We might well ask, “Why did God allow this?” And surely the answer is, God did not “allow” this, he “ordained” it! He caused it to happen! Have you ever thought of it that way? Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem because that is where God wanted them, and there was no room in the inn because God wanted it that way. As one preacher put it, “If God had wanted it some other way, then it would have happened that ‘other way’.”<sup>5</sup>

We must wonder, still, why would God send his Son into the world in this manner? The great English preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrestled with this question in one of his sermons on this text.<sup>6</sup> Mr. Spurgeon offered three suggested answers.

First, Christ was born like this to show his humiliation. “Would it have been fitting”, Mr. Spurgeon asked, “that the man who was to die naked on the cross should be robed in purple at his birth?” Of course not. Jesus was never much more than a peasant during his life. Nothing would have been more fitting for Jesus than to be born in a manger, for he left the glory of heaven to come to earth as a servant.

Second, Mr. Spurgeon says, Jesus was born in a stable because he was the King of the Poor. The poor and the outcasts of the world, even today, know that Jesus was one of them because of the circumstances of his birth. This was no privileged son, no wealthy heir of a rich family; this was the humble Jesus, champion of the poor and the outcasts of the world, and they know that in Jesus they have a friend who cares about them.

The third reason Mr. Spurgeon suggests is this: Jesus was born in a stable in order that the humble people of the earth might feel invited to come to him. Think about it for a moment. Jesus was turned away from the inn, he

was born in a stable . . . isn't this an invitation to everyone who is rejected, abused, mistreated, forgotten, or overlooked, that all of these, and more, can come to Jesus for forgiveness and for salvation.

“We might tremble to approach a throne, but we cannot fear to approach a manger”, Mr. Spurgeon said. If Jesus had been born in Miami Beach, or in London, or in Paris, or in Los Angeles, only the well-heeled and the rich would feel at home with him. But because Jesus came from such humble and poor circumstances, every outsider of the entire world can feel a kinship with Jesus. And by the way, in the world, there are far more “outsiders” than “insiders”.

Jesus' ministry on earth was remarkable in the amount of time he spent with outcasts and those whom society tended to ignore. Even as an infant, by being laid in a manger, he was set forth as the sinner's friend. Now that we know why he came, surely we would say, “He had to be born like this. It couldn't have happened any other way.”

This is a true Incarnation, Emanuel, God with us. Saint Paul put it in theological terms when he wrote in Philippians 2:7-8, “. . . [Christ] made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!”

Isn't that just like God, to use circumstances that seem to be unfavorable or even hostile to accomplish his will for us? I am sure that when Joseph and Mary were turned away from the inn they were devastated, wondering where they would go. Surely having to go to the stable tested their faith to the very limit and it probably made no sense at all to them.

But there was God, working out his divine purposes for this baby who was the Son of God.

Psalm 115:3 says, “Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.”

Often God does not consult us in advance. Often he does not answer when we ask “Why?”. But God is always good and just and merciful and we can trust him.

Though there was no room for Jesus that night in Bethlehem, is there room for him today? Is there room in your life and your heart?

As Charles Spurgeon closed his famous sermon on this text, he made the invitation clear:

Even as an infant, by being laid in a manger, he was set forth as the sinner’s friend. Come to him, ye that are weary and heavy-laden! Come to him, ye that are broken in spirit, ye who are bowed down in soul! Come to him, ye that despise yourselves and are despised of others! Come to him, publican<sup>7</sup> and harlot! Come to him, thief and drunkard! In the manger there he lies, unguarded from your touch and unshielded from your gaze. Bow the knee, and kiss the Son of God; accept him as your Saviour, for he puts himself into that manger that you may approach him.<sup>8</sup>

Amen

Jesus said: I am the bread of life. All who come to me shall not hunger, and all who believe in me shall not thirst. With Christians around the world and throughout the centuries, we gather around these symbols of bread and wine—simple elements that speak of nourishment and transformation.

Let us pray.

Loving God, we thank you that you are as close to us as breath, that your love is constant and unfailing. We thank you for all that sustains life, and especially for Jesus Christ, who teaches us how to live out an ethic of justice and peace, and for the promise of transformation made manifest in his life, death and resurrection.

We ask you to bless this bread and this cup. Through this meal, make us

the body of Christ, that we may join with you in promoting the well-being of all creation. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

We remember on the night when Jesus and the disciples had their last meal together. Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, and gave it to the disciples, saying "This is my body, which is given for you. Take and eat it, and as often as you do, remember me."

In the symbol of the broken bread, we participate in the life of Christ and dedicate ourselves to being his disciples.

In the same way he took the cup, and after giving thanks he passed it to the disciples, saying: "Drink this, all of you. This cup is the new covenant, poured out for you and for many. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

In the symbol of the cup, we participate in the new life Christ brings.

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The body of Christ, given for you.

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

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Let us pray. We give thanks, loving God, that you have refreshed us at your table. Strengthen our faith; increase our love for one another. As we have been fed by the seed that became grain, and then became bread, may we go out into the world to plant seeds of justice, transformation, and hope. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.<sup>9</sup>

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1. I first encountered this catchy title in a helpful article by the Rev. Dr. Ray Pritchard of Keep Believing Ministries. When I did a “Dr. Google” search, I discovered it has been used a number of times by various ministers. I could not find the original creative mind behind this catchy phrase.
  2. The word “Advent” means “coming” or “arrival”. The focus of the entire season is the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ in his First Advent, and the anticipation of the return of Christ the King in his Second Advent. Advent is the beginning of the Church Year for most churches in the Western tradition. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day, which is the Sunday nearest November 30, and ends on Christmas Eve (Dec 24). (If Christmas Eve is a Sunday, it is counted as the fourth Sunday of Advent, with Christmas Eve proper beginning at sundown.) See “The Season of Advent: Anticipation and Hope”, by Dennis Bratcher, published in *The Voice: Biblical and Theological Resources for Growing Christians*, [www.cresourcei.org/cyadvent.html](http://www.cresourcei.org/cyadvent.html).
  3. “Abba’ is the Aramaic word for ‘father’ used by Jesus to speak of His own intimate relationship with God, a relationship that others can enter through faith.” From “Abba”, by Michael Fink, *Holman Bible Dictionary*, edited by Trent C. Butler, [www.studylight.org/dictionaries/hbd/view.cgi?n=9](http://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/hbd/view.cgi?n=9), c. 1991.
  4. “Magi” is the term used for the wise men (probably astrologers) who came from the east to see Jesus. We usually think of them as three in number, but the Bible does not say how many there were. Their visit to Jesus is only described in the Gospel of Matthew.
  5. Dr. Ray Pritchard, in “No Crib for a Bed: The God of Every Circumstance”, [www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/no-crib-for-a-bed-the-god-of-every-circumstance](http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/no-crib-for-a-bed-the-god-of-every-circumstance). Dr. Pritchard serves as president of Keep Believing Ministries and has been very kind to me personally in sharing the resources of his ministry. He has been pastor of churches in Los Angeles, Dallas, and Chicago, and most recently at Calvary Memorial Church in Oak Park, IL. He is a graduate of Tennessee Temple University (B.A.), Dallas Theological Seminary (Th.M.), and Talbot School of Theology

(D.Min.).

6. “No Room for Christ in the Inn”, a sermon (No. 485) delivered on Sunday morning, December 21st, 1862, by Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington (London). <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0485.htm>
7. A publican in the ancient world was a public contractor, and one of their duties was collecting taxes. Often they were corrupt.
8. “No Room for Christ in the Inn”, cited above.
9. This communion liturgy was adapted from “A Brief Communion Service”, written by the Rev. Dr. Jeanyne B. Slettom, found at <http://processandfaith.org/resources/liturgy/brief-communion-service>. Dr. Slettom is co-pastor of Brea Congregational United Church of Christ in Brea, California.