

December 24, 2021

Texts: Isaiah 9: 2-9, Luke 2: 1-20

Title: "The Light Still Shines"

Some churches have a tradition of a nativity pageant on Christmas Eve. There was one some years ago that one boy tried to sabotage. Now who would want to do that? It seems that this boy was disappointed at not being cast as Joseph in the play. He was given the role of the innkeeper instead which was a minor role.

So when the night of the big performance came, he was prepared. Joseph and Mary made their entrance and knocked on the door of the inn. This boy opened the door. Now Joseph expected the innkeeper to follow the script and answer that he had no room for them in the inn. Instead, the boy flung the door open and said, "Come in, come in. You shall have the best room in the hotel."

There was a pause. The young man playing Joseph hadn't expected this and didn't know exactly what to do. But then, with great presence of mind, he turned to Mary and said, "Hold on. I'll take a look inside first." He looked around, shook his head and announced, "I'm not taking my wife into a place like this. Come on, Mary, we'll sleep in the stable." And that's what they did. The plot was back on course. Well, as you and I know, that's not exactly how the story of the first Christmas unfolded. Mary and Joseph had no choice but to sleep in a stable. And in fact, **this was the plan of God.**

Now Mary and Joseph were not among the cultural elite of their time. They couldn't have afforded a room at the Hilton even if there'd been one. They were strangers with very few resources. There's a lesson here for us. Often it's people

who start out in the most difficult of circumstances who end up having the greatest impact on the world.

I'm thinking about the story of a young man who struggled greatly with frail health all his life. As an adult, he was a pastor but didn't have the physical stamina to serve his congregation. Instead he wrote them letters filled full of Christian hope and ministered to people that way.

He often complained about the shortage of good hymns in his day. Someone challenged him to write a better one. So he did. He wrote over 600 hymns-- mostly hymns of praise. His name? Isaac Watts. His greatest Christmas hymn was "Joy to the World! the Lord is come."

Could Isaac Watts have written so, if his life had been privileged? I don't know. It's amazing how often people who've had everything materially in their lives have the hardest time understanding the power of faith, whereas those who struggle through life learn the power of faith in God.

In Luke's story, the primary attendants to Jesus' birth are shepherds.

Shepherding was one of the more humble and low paid occupations ever. They were watching over a bunch of smelly sheep. Only God would've glorified such a lowly occupation by having them present for this, the holiest of events.

And that's the way God works. He takes the lowliest of people and those who understand humility and raises them up. I think it's God's way of showing us that we should never look down on another human being. Everyone IS beautiful in his or her own way. So let's learn a lesson from the innkeeper at that first nativity. Be

careful whom you turn away from your door. Be careful whom you snub at school, or at work, or in our own community.

And that's the essential meaning of this sacred night. Through the babe of Bethlehem God has made Himself available to us all. We don't have to worship God from afar. He's now available to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Even the humblest place and the humblest people take on a new significance when touched by the hand of God. He's available to us. But not if we stand at a distance and merely tip our hats. We must welcome His Spirit into our lives so that He can become part of our very being.

Have you taken that step in your life? If you would do that tonight, you'll never forget Christmas Eve 2021. It will be the definitive moment in your life. The light of Christ still shines. On this, the holiest of nights, let it shine in your life. Amen.