



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for December 24, 2021
“Images of Christmas: A Baby’s Birth”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Luke 2:1-7

Noche Buena, the Good Night

This night has finally arrived. We find ourselves celebrating the birth of Christ.

Hispanics around the world celebrate what is called, Noche Buena, the Good Night. It features plenty of food, festive music, and time with family and friends. Gifts are exchanged sometime after midnight. It is quite the celebration. There is every reason to celebrate this evening. Christ is born.

The birth of a baby brings instant joy. The crowds that gather around the nursery at any hospital are testimony to the attraction we all have to new life. Birth is a miracle that leaves us to stand in awe.

And so, we come tonight to celebrate the great thing that has taken place. Christ is born and we can do no other but offer our praise.

It Has Come to This Moment

We’ve been preparing for a long time. The stores have been advertising Christmas since the day after Halloween. Our decorations at the church have been up for a month. Parties have been planned and by this time have taken place.

Gifts have been purchased and placed under our Christmas trees. Families are already assembling from far and wide to enjoy one another’s company. We come to this moment more than a little exhausted, yet we come all the more. The celebration of Christmas distills to this moment where we focus on the birth of Christ.

Born of Humble Estate

We remember the night when Mary gave birth to her son and did so in a borrowed stable. The humble surroundings make a profound statement about the sort of Messiah Jesus would be. He was born of humble estate speaking volumes about his own humility.

We should *“have this mind that was in Christ Jesus,”* Paul reminds us, *“for he did not count equality with God something to be grasped but emptied himself taking on the form of a servant.”*

No Room in the Inn

It is always hectic around the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, particularly this time of year. Thousands of people stream there each year.

The night Jesus was born the town was filled with people responding to the census ordered by Caesar Augustus.

Much is made about there being no room in the inn that first Christmas. At least the innkeeper was benevolent enough to offer a stable. As the great carol, *Joy to the World* reminds us that every heart needs to “*prepare him room.*”

The coldness and lack of hospitality found in Bethlehem so often reflects the landscape of our own hearts. It’s all too easy, isn’t it, to crowd Jesus out and I’m not just talking about the busyness that so prevails this season of the year. We let so many other things take priority rather than giving Christ room.

Decorating the Inside

We are good about decorating on the outside when sometimes the inside goes wanting. We spend all sorts of time and energy with appearances when the most important thing we can do is deal with things on the inside.

We need to make him room inside first and the outside will follow.

Making Time

Today/tonight though is great testimony to our deep desire to seek for Christ. There are a million other things you could be doing right now, but you chose to come here and to worship the newborn king.

We are forever using the excuse that we don’t have time to do this or that when in reality we make time for what we consider most important.

Welcome Him into Our Hearts

We’ve done a lot a decorating around our house. Among the decoration are a number of Nativities we have collected over the years. Front and center though, is an olive wood crèche that Cheryl’s dad brought back from a trip to the Holy Land.

We set it up with great care and make sure that the manger is as it should be—the focus of everyone’s attention. As a matter of family tradition, we don’t put the baby Jesus in the manger until Christmas Day.

Years ago, when our boys were much younger, we put him in a few days early and our son, John, let us know about it.

We need to put Jesus where he longs to be and I’m not talking about a crèche somewhere. We need to welcome him into our hearts. Regrettably, far too many either forget or refuse to invite him in.

Let Earth Receive Her King

Today we celebrate that Christ is born, and because of that it is a “*good night.*”

“*Let earth receive her King; let every heart prepare him room.*” Joy to the world!