

Luke 2:1-7

Christmas Eve

December 24, 1999

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

Somewhere tonight a young girl protects her infant. She is looking for a place, shelter from the cold, safety from those who might harm her child. She is walking, looking, searching. On this very night while families are gathered, sharing food, sharing love no doors have opened to her. At this moment while churches are filled with singing and candlelight she is shivering as she holds her child closer. Why is she wandering? Why does she need help?

Has she made some bad decisions? Did she fail to do the planning that needed to be done? Did she trust someone who failed her? This night none of that really matters; she just needs a place that is warm – some food – some rest - safety for herself and her child.

On that night so long ago Joseph was looking for a place in Bethlehem. The Emperor Augustus had ordered a census – everyone was expected to register in the city of his ancestors. So Joseph left his home in Nazareth and journeyed to Bethlehem – the city of David. With him was Mary who was soon to give birth to her first child.

In Bethlehem here was no room for them in the inn. That is all that we are told – no room for them.

Joseph and Mary looked for shelter – a place to rest - a place for her child to be born. We speak of a stable – though the scriptures never speak of Joseph finding a stable. All that is said is that the baby was placed in a manger, a feeding trough for the livestock.

Our Lord was born among the homeless ones – born to people who were street persons that night. Maybe those who looked from their warm homes to see Mary and Joseph searching wondered why this

man and this pregnant girl had come to be where they were - a bad decision to begin a journey at that time – a lack of planning to prepare a place before their arrival? Or was it God's doing?

Had the decision of the emperor to conduct a census brought them to this place – or was it God's doing? And years later would it be the hatred of the religious leaders that would bring Jesus to the cross or would it be God's doing? Did God send God's Son to be born among the homeless ones – to die with all the rejected ones, to be counted as one of the unlucky ones? I think so.

How God's heart must ache for young girls whose lives have been shattered – for people whose homes have been destroyed by flood or wind or earthquake. How God's heart must ache for daughters whose mother's are dying, mother's whose sons have died, husbands whose wives have left them. How God's heart must ache for those who have lost hope for reconciliation – friendships betrayed – sisters no longer speaking to one another – all the people of that girl's life that I spoke of at the beginning of this sermon who have given up all hope for her. How God's heart must ache seeing whole peoples crushed by the hatred of enemy soldiers – left defeated – despairing. How God's heart aches for us all.

Why doesn't God just fix things – find a place tonight for that girl – keep the storms from happening – protect us from wars? That is what we pray for. So why does God not fix things? I don't know. But I suspect that as soon as God would fix things we would break them once again. Instead of fixing everything and every one God sent God's Son.

God sent Jesus to you – for you. So much of what you pray for you may not get, but God gives you the one you need. I hope this night for food for every hungry one, shelter for every hungry one, a friend for every lonely one.

But even more I hope for them faith in Jesus. For Jesus entered the very places you most fear, pain - having no home - having those who counted on you disappointed in you. Jesus walked through a day

when the only voices he heard were ridicule and mocking. Jesus died feeling abandoned by God. He endured it all for you.

I am with you always he promised after the Father had raised him out of death. He keeps that promise for homeless mothers and drug addicts and widows. I am with you always is his promise for when you are dying, or fear filled or a failure. You and I will keep on praying for many things but I hope we will trust most of all in Jesus' love.

The people who passed by that night in Bethlehem must have thought it a wretched sight: Mary showing the strain and exhaustion of childbirth, the baby Jesus lying where animals had recently fed, the whole scene so pathetic.

But if they could have seen into Mary's heart and Joseph's heart they would have seen the beauty and peace and hope our Christmas cards portray. For that night so long ago was transformed by faith in God.

Pray that your days and nights and mine as well will be transformed in that same way as we rejoice and trust in the only Son of God.