

What did the eyes in Bethlehem see? A man and his wife enter into town, making their way through crowds of people there to be registered for Caesar's tax. What do the eyes see? A woman who had become pregnant before her marriage. This sacred space and the use of the word in our culture as a vulgarity preclude us from uttering the actual word, but we all know the term for such a child. We all know the all-too common epithets for such a woman. The beloved King James translation from which we heard the Holy Gospel tonight tells us that Mary laid her Son "**in the manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.**" Our childhood pageants have us picture something like a first century Motel 6 with a scowling innkeeper telling them, "All full." We know that Joseph and Mary were poor. The sacrifice Mary offered forty days after her Son's birth for her ritual purification was the two doves of a poor person instead of the usual lamb. So, we generally assume there was "no room" due to lack of money.

As sad as that is, as much as that ought to open your eyes in mercy and compassion for your neighbor in need not just during this season, but throughout the year, the reality was likely far more heartbreaking. Joseph and Mary are both of the lineage of David. They are returning to their ancestral home. Bethlehem is full of their relatives. The word translated as "inn," is literally, "guest room." It is the word used for the room every house in the ancient world had for friends and relatives to stay in. It's the room that your aunt has in her home and is insulted beyond measure if you trade that for the Holiday Inn. The room is there precisely for people like Joseph and Mary and the child about to be born.

Well, not exactly people like *them*. Even if the scandalous news had not trickled down from Galilee, the eyes of the extended family fall upon Mary's belly, great with child, and ancient relatives can do math just as well as we. No room for a woman or a child like *that* in this house! What do the eyes see? Nobodies, poor lowlifes, an unfaithful bride to Joseph and a scandal of a child. So this young mother gives birth in a place for animals. No crib for a bed, so the child is tucked away in a manger, wrapped up in strips of cloth. That is what the eyes see.

But what does God see? Listen to what He has His angel to say to the shepherds: "**unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.**" The eyes see "**the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.**" That is what God bids the shepherds and we ourselves to look for. And God tells you this is the Christ, the Messiah, the long-promised One, the Lord, that is Yahweh, God Himself.

*Ah, Lord, though You created all,  
How weak You are, so poor and small,  
That You should choose to lay Your head  
Where lowly cattle lately fed!*

This scandalous, despised little Child, is the Divine Son of the Father, and He is the Savior. That is to say, He has come to save sinners. Look at yourself and what do your eyes see? If you would have true joy this night, if you would have comfort and consolation beyond mere nostalgia and emotions, if you would have a joy that exceeds the happiness of getting what you always wanted under the tree, then you will see yourself as a sinner in need of saving. Do not go by what your eyes see on their own, a "pretty good person," with good intentions, a hard worker, not as bad as that other person, and after all, you spent so much on some really nice gifts for everyone, even your cousin who drives you crazy!

Go by what God sees. Go by what God's Word says. His Word that says that the news of this Child is a tiding of joy for all people – ALL people. That includes you. The news of the birth of this poor, lowly baby is a tiding of comfort and joy because He is the Savior of sinners. You need a Savior like that! He is the Savior for you!

*This is the Christ, our God Most High,  
Who hears your sad and bitter cry;  
He will Himself your Savior be  
From all your sins to set you free.*

That is what He has done. Just as He was despised and rejected in birth, so also in His life. The prophet Isaiah tells us **“He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him.”** He was eventually rejected unto death. **“Despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.”** Isaiah, who prophesies so beautifully and clearly of His birth, with equal and beautiful clarity speaks of the rejection of this One by the Father: **“We esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.”** Indeed, the hymn for this time of the year reminds us of what is to come:

*Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,  
The cross be borne for me, for you;*

This Child was born, lived, suffered, died, He was rejected, for you. He rose victorious in flesh, far fresher and more glorious than that of a newborn babe. And He did that for you. Your eyes cannot tell you this. But that is what God says. Your ears will tell you that these are just words. They sound like any other. Your eyes and your tongue will tell you that it is but bread and wine that you receive at the altar. But as on that first Christmas night, it is what God says that matters.

That child, born so many years ago, is the Savior, Christ the Lord, born for you. That man, hanging dead on a tree, is the Savior, Christ the Lord, dead and risen for you. His forgiveness, His love, His peace and the joy it gives, is God's own for you. And the bread and wine you receive is that very flesh and blood born of the Virgin Mary, hailed by angels, and adored by shepherds, given and shed for you. Come, adore on bended knee, O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!