

“It’s all in the details”

- As we finished our Advent journey, and the wait is over
  - (It’s a boy!)
  - Jesus is here! Born to us as a humble, newborn infant
  - I cannot help it- hearing about the new parents
  - I am reminded of my own journey to fatherhood back some seven and half years ago
  - As Katy and I often do in life, we made a lot of plans- detailed plans
  - We went to our birthing class, we created our birth plan
  - Katy didn’t want to be induced, and didn’t want pain meds- I know, true story, hard to believe at this point
  - We had practiced our pain management techniques, I had my special jobs to do, and our doula was on call
  - We even went to our doctor and told him all of this, including the express desire to not know the sex of the baby before the birth!
  - The doctor just smiled, in that way that doctors do when they know nothing turns out like you plan
  - And sure enough... one fateful Friday, we learned that all of our plans were for naught
  - Gaius, our son, was breech, and we would need a C section, and so we made new plans and scheduled the appointment
  - And yet again, plans being folly, she went into labor and we had to have an emergency C section after all- nothing like our plans
  - One up side- with emergency C section, it all happened so fast that our families could not make the 3 hour drive in time to be there
  - That meant that Katy and I had about an hour alone with the new baby before anyone arrived...
  - And now, even though the details of our son’s birth were not what we had hoped, not what we have planned or even imagined
  - Those details now mean so much us, because they are a part of our story- they are a part of us
- As I think about Christmas, and about the expectation that Mary and Joseph felt, and even God felt
  - I cannot help but think of my own experience with Gaius

- And if each detail mattered so much to us, even as they didn't turn out anything like we planned
- Just how much more these details of God's only son being born mattered to God
- I imagine that the birth plan God created was exactly what happened
- So what can we see in this, this great event that has left the world forever changed?
- We can start by reading our Gospel for today, which is from the Gospel of Luke
- Luke is good with details... in fact, it is among the ways he is different from the other gospel authors
- He takes extra care to situate Jesus's birth plan in as much context as possible
- It was when Emperor Augustus was in power, and when he created a census for the people
- And if that is not specific enough, It happened while when Quirinius was governor of Syria
- Now it is true that Luke didn't quite get these details historically accurate... <sup>1</sup>
  - But give him some credit, he is writing this about 100 years after Jesus was born
  - And was being revised well into the 2nd century
- The point, of course, is that this event happened in history, not some "long time ago in a land far far away" fairy tale<sup>2</sup>
- The basis for the Christian faith and good news is based on a historical event, and the details matter
- These holy events that begin with Mary and Joseph, traveling, going into labor,
- And discovering that no one had room for them.
- It would only foreshadows Jesus' whole life
- Repeatedly, the world did not have room for him, or for his message, or for his followers
- And so God, in spite of this less than warm welcome, was committed to the plan, and was born in a stable
- Taking on extra risk in extra unsanitary conditions
- And who was there to be a part of this intimate moment? Not family, not parents or in-laws

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel\\_of\\_Luke#Textual\\_history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Luke#Textual_history)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.montreal.anglican.org/comments/zxmasam.shtml?>

- But Shepherds. Men who had been out in the fields for days and days, maybe weeks, with little chance to clean up
- Walking around a bunch of sheep, stepping in things that are not discussed in polite company
- Shepherds ranked low in the societal hierarchy, often viewed with suspicion and assumed to be less than honest<sup>3</sup>
- It was not uncommon for Shepherds to sell off some newborn sheep without the owner even knowing.
  - after all, they were mostly out in the fields away from oversight
- And it was this motley crew to whom God chose to send the angels
- And those God chose to be a part of the birth plan and accompany Mary and Joseph in this stressful, unpredictable night.
- For more details of this unusual birth plan,
  - We can also turn to the gospel of Matthew
  - And there, we learn that in addition to shepherds, Wise men from the east followed the star to find the new born King
  - Gentiles, from a far away land, who were essentially astrologers, or soothsayers, coming to be a part of Jesus' early life
  - Can you think of anything more different than the Jewish people, focused on cultural and ritual cleanliness?
  - And then there was Herod, representing the oppressive Roman Empire, and virtually all other empires seeking to maintain their power
  - It was Herod who caused Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to flee their home and their country to go to Egypt for safety
  - Egypt! Where their ancestors were held in slavery, and yet where now is more safe for God than the promised land.
  - With all of time and the whole world from which to chose, what a fascinating birth plan God has created.
- Now we can discuss and debate the historical accuracy of the gospels
  - And perhaps at another time besides Christmas Eve itself that would be a worthwhile discussion
  - Today/Tonight it is worth effort to instead consider why these events are what they are, and why they are recorded in this manner
  - Because here's what I know- all of this matters.
  - What God did, what Jesus did, what happened, and what the Gospel authors wrote down...
  - **All of it exists to communicate to us important facets of this amazing moment in God's ongoing plan for the world**

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<sup>3</sup> New Interpreters Bible Commentary

- In John's gospel, that is the point- the Word made flesh
- The Word that helped create all things in Genesis, now comes among us and continues to speak
- Literally a message from God is delivered into the world, in the flesh, through water, pain and blood- just like you and me
- If God worked so hard on this particular, word, or message for us, what can we hear?
- What message do we receive?
- These birth narratives contain people and settings that we, as followers of Christ, simply can not ignore
- Homeless, travelers, unsavory characters, and those from far away lands with differing views and religions
- If we follow Jesus Christ, then we have acknowledge that it is in those people, and to those people, that God appeared
- And if we do not see them, we run the risk of failing to see God in our midst
- We are told in Hebrews that we should not forget to show hospitality to strangers, because by doing so some have entertained angels
- God says, do not overlook those who are so often ignored... you may in fact fail to see me
- I believe that none of it was an accident, none of it haphazard
- That God meticulously planed the events of Jesus' birth, and the gospel writers wrote it down the best they could
- Do you see someone who is dirty, uncultured, and maybe even a little dishonest? Remember it was shepherds to whom angels sang
- See people of different faiths and nationalities? God showed the wise men from the East a great star
- See a young, poor, unmarried couple getting in over their head, even perhaps about to have a baby?
  - God says they are good enough to bring about God's son into the world.
- See someone fleeing violence and heading to a strange land for safety?
  - It is what Mary, Joseph, and Jesus had to do to escape Herod.
- In yet one more way, for one more time, in what I think is one more attempt, God has tried to send us this very message
- God wants us look up, look outside of ourselves, push against our own tendencies to write people off
- **To challenge our neighbors, our leaders, that there is no us and them... just all of us, God's children**
- It is the message Jesus went on to repeat throughout his life

- And the one God imprinted on his very birth.
- And of course, the most important message of all contained in the Incarnation of God
  - **That you and I are beloved children of God**
  - We are no longer just part of creation, no longer just mud and breath put together on day 6 of Genesis' account of creation
  - We are reminded once again we are made in God's image
  - Jesus became flesh and blood, and removed the divide that separated us from the holy
  - And we are worth all of what God is doing- we are worth saving, worth the message sent in the flesh
  - You, me, and the rest of God's children walking this earth
  - We are the recipients of the very love of God
  - No matter how bad it gets, no matter how dark the world seems, there is still hope..
  - The hope for the world is that God recommitted to us by coming in the flesh, personally, so many years ago with all the right details
  - And continues to show up in our prayers, our worship, and in the faces of friends and strangers asking for us to love them
  - Love when it's messy, love when it is unsafe
  - Love when it hurts and costs us
  - Love like God loves.
  - That's the message God repeats over and over- love
  - The Message meticulously packaged in historical events, and sent years ago, and that still is given freely
  - To Love yourselves, love each other, and love those so easily ignored and overlooked
  - When it comes to Christmas, when it comes to sending us this holy message, it is God who is in the details.

Amen.