



Sermons from St. Marks United Church of Christ New Albany, Indiana



Christmas Eve 2006

Sometimes we miss things.

Grandma Ruby found buying presents for family and friends a bit much at Christmas now that she was in her 90's, so this time she wrote out checks for all of them to put in their Christmas cards. In each card she carefully wrote, "Buy your own present" and then sent them off.

After the Christmas festivities were over, she found the checks under a pile of papers on her desk. So everyone on her gift list had received a beautiful Christmas card from her with "Buy your own present" written inside -- without the check! Sometimes we miss things.

Something many people missed at the time was the fact that Christmas Eve was changed dramatically on December 24, 1818.

At St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, Austria, a little village in the Austrian Alps, they had a problem. It was Christmas Eve and the church organ was broken.

The pastor Josef Mohr had written a poem, a cradle poem, about the birth of Jesus. He wasn't, however, a musician, so he gave the poem to the church's organist, Franz Gruber and asked Gruber if he could write a simple melody that could be played on the guitar.

Gruber came up with a simple but beautiful melody and the two men sang the song, *Stille Nacht*, to the congregation that night to the tiny congregation. No one realized that the most beloved of Christmas carols was given to the world that night. No one in the rest of the world realized that, on that night in a tiny Austrian village, Christmas Eve Worship would be impacted forever. Indeed it was. Christmas Eve night without singing *Silent Night* would just not do!

Sometimes people miss things.

There was another song sung on another night that the world didn't realize was going to change life forever. In the third song Luke shares with us, we have the angels singing "Glory to God in the highest," and the song is heard by only a group of random shepherds. The rest of the world missed it.

I have often wondered how, 30 years later, with such a dramatic birth, people didn't realize what was going on.

Jesus.

Ponder, if you will, the impact the birth of Jesus had. Even if one puts aside Jesus' divinity, from the human perspective Jesus' impact on the world was and is incredible.

In that day and age life was ruled and controlled by the Roman Empire. It was the largest, longest lasting, and greatest empire in human history. Jesus' words and his followers would, one day, take the empire over and change it forever.

In Jesus' name some of the world's greatest architecture has taken place. Churches and cathedrals around the world, built to the glory of Jesus, stand as a tribute to the impact of Jesus.

Some of the most beautiful art in human history has been done in the name of Jesus.

Some of the most beautiful music in human history has been done in the name of Jesus.

Unfortunately wars have been fought in the name of Jesus.

Jesus' words and his teachings are, at face value, incredibly simple----yet for over 19 and a half centuries the world's greatest scholars have debated what he was saying and still haven't definitively determined the depth of Jesus' words.

And, of course, twenty centuries after Jesus was born in a stable the world still honors his birth.

The thing is, you need to deal with Jesus from more than a human perspective. Jesus was so much more than any average human being. Jesus was the Son of God.

One of the most ancient creeds of the Christian Church is the Nicene Creed says this of Jesus:

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, light from light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;*

God's Son, the most impactful person in human history, the very flesh of God, was born into the world amidst a chorus of angels ---and the world missed it. In fact, it was worse than that. Luke tell us that there was no room at the inn. Angels are singing, God's Son is being born into the world, human history is about to be put on its ear, and there was no room at the inn. Christ the Savior was

born----off to the side, out of sight and out of mind.

I suspect that Jesus still is often out of sight, out of mind. Angels still sing, God is still present, and we miss Jesus.

Sometimes we miss Jesus because we get caught up in stuff.

Malls have been filled, this past month, with people screaming at each other. The hottest toys were purchased after people spent nights on the sidewalk waiting to get into stores, and now are being sold on E-Bay for ten times their original price and they were sold one after another. People have become maniacs over video games. We get so caught up in stuff that the angels are singing and the baby is there, and we miss it because we need to get that video game.

Sometimes we miss Jesus because we don't really want to encounter what are getting in Jesus. If we really do believe that Jesus is both human and divine, both God and a human being, then God reveals to us, in a very profound way both who God is and who we are. In Jesus Christ we see the real nature of humanity. The real goal of being human isn't about success, isn't about fame and fortune, it's about being like Jesus and learning to live like Jesus. In Jesus we have a complete human being and a perfect human life; here is the ultimate standard for everything human.

All of which means that Jesus becomes a profound model to us----and a massive challenge.

So, sometimes the angels sing and the baby stays in the stable because it's all too much for us.

But----with the birth of Jesus, it all changed. The world was changed.

You know what's funny? I've been a pastor long enough to expect things. I suspect that in 1818 when people were walking out of St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf there were comments about *Stille Nacht*.

"That was kind of cute, but I missed singing **real** Christmas carols."

"Can you believe that they had the nerve to use a guitar in church?"

"Did you listen to that song? Ugh. Mohr and Gruber and had better not quit their day jobs."

We can laugh now. We know what that song did to Christmas Eve Worship. But I wonder if the people there, that night, had a clue.

And so it is with the song of the angels. The angels sang. The baby was born. And the world missed it. People were caught up in their lives, in their stuff, and, frankly, Emmanuel, God with us, is scary and serious.

But a song is sung whether we want to listen or not. Angels do sing a glorious song announcing to the world that the Savior had been born. We can either join in the chorus or cover our ears and pretend that we can't hear it.

The child is born. There may be no room at the inn, but we are invited to the stable to Worship the child. Or we can stay home and pretend the child is not there.

The Lord has come into the world and we have been giving an invitation to sing and to embrace. It is up to us whether we accept the invitation-----or not.