

Born In A Barn Advent 2016

Today is the first Sunday of Advent and it is also family day at Carbondale as our children join us for worship and communion this morning. Allow me to explain why we feel Advent is important for the church. The word Advent simply means “coming.” When we refer to the season of Advent, we are talking about the four Sundays prior to Christmas in which we anticipate the birth of Jesus, the coming of Jesus. What do you do when you anticipate the birth of a baby? Some of you may have a new baby in your family, a baby brother or sister. What did you do when you knew a baby was coming? You prepared. You fixed up the nursery. You bought a baby bed and got things ready. The focus was on the baby that was coming. That’s what Advent is about. Jesus is coming and we prepare our hearts for his birth, for his arrival. We focus on Jesus and on his needs instead of our own needs. We want to get our hearts ready for Jesus. And during this time, we focus not only upon his first advent, we aren’t focused just on baby Jesus, but we are focused on his second coming as well. Jesus came as a baby in Bethlehem but he is coming again as our King of Kings! Are we ready for his coming? Are we ready to receive him as Savior and Lord and coming king?

With Christmas having become so secular, it’s all about Santa Claus and presents, we feel it is important for the church to celebrate Advent, to put the focus for us back where it belongs, on Jesus and his birth, his incarnation. To help us mark the Sundays as we anticipate the celebration of his birth, we use an Advent wreath and we light a different candle each of the four Sundays of Advent. For our Carbondale Kids there is more about the wreath and candles and their meaning in your activity booklet so be sure and read about it! As we light the first candle of Advent, let’s prepare our hearts. Stand as we read responsively the word of the Lord.

Congregation: A voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 40:3-5)

Reader: In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’ (Matthew 3:1-3)

Congregation: “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.” (Romans 15:12)

Reader: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)

As we light the Advent candle this morning, let’s take a moment to examine and prepare our hearts for his coming. Prepare the way for the Lord and his work in your life. Let us confess our sins and turn to the Lord with our whole heart. “Father of light and life, we turn our hearts toward you today in repentance and in faith. We prepare our hearts, humbly asking for your forgiveness, confessing our sins to you. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon us and forgive our sins. Come Lord Jesus and be born in us today. May the light of your grace and mercy dispel the darkness in our life and may your light shine brightly in us and through us as we prepare our hearts to celebrate your birth. God of hope, fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in you and may we overflow with hope in this season of Advent. Amen.

As part of our worship we are celebrating communion this morning. If you have children with you, we think this is an important time to be able to receive communion together as a family.

We talk about this as a time of remembrance. On the front of the communion table it says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” What do we remember? We remember that Jesus is God’s son and our Savior and Lord. We remember what Jesus did, that he took our place on the cross and bore the penalty for our sins so we could be forgiven. His body, represented by the bread of communion, was nailed to the cross and his blood, represented by the juice in the cup, was spilled for us so our sins could be forgiven and washed away. We remember what Jesus did on the cross and what he does for us now! If we repent and ask Jesus to forgive us, he will take away our sin and come live in our heart. He will be with us to help us and will be just as near and as real to us as the bread we touch with our hands and the cup we touch with our lips. Finally, we remember that Jesus is coming again. The bible says we are to continue to take communion together, to remember all Jesus did and all he is, until he comes again to take us to heaven. So as we take communion this morning, let’s remember these things.

The word of the Lord from 1 Corinthians 11. “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘this is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of

me.’ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, when you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” “Lord by your grace and mercy alone we come to your table to receive the gifts of your body and your blood given for us that we might be saved. May our hearts be united with you in the fellowship of your suffering and in the power of your resurrection as we humbly come to you in faith. In Jesus name. Amen.” Come to the Lord’s table as we worship together.

Born In A Barn 2016

I shared this thought a couple of years ago on a Sunday night but felt I was to share this for our family day service. Turn with me to Luke 2:1-20 and let’s read Luke’s account of the Christmas story.

It amazes me every time I read it. To think, God in flesh and a handful of shepherds were the only ones to know and to rejoice. Here is the Son of God, and where is he born? In a stable with a feeding trough, a manger for a bed. The Son of God born in a born. I’m a city boy but I’ve been in a few barns in my life. None of them were a place I would want to take my newborn, or my expectant wife. **Why was Jesus born in a stable? A barn?**

The obvious reason: “there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2:7 Luke has already explained the situation. There was a census being taken of the entire Roman world. Each person had to go to their home town to register and be taxed in the process. It meant people had to leave their business, their homes and make a journey of some distance which probably put everyone in a less than pleasant mood. The little town of Bethlehem was overcrowded by the folks that had returned, all part of the family of David.

People were hurrying to get the last rooms in town and the inn was full. The town literally ran out of rooms to stay in. (I know one answer to why Jesus was born in a barn would be, because Joseph refused to call ahead and make reservations for a room.) I know how Joseph felt. I’ve been there and done that. I’ve told you before about going to Portland, Oregon for General Council one year. We decided to drive and enjoy a vacation with the girls. We pulled into Spokane, Washington fairly early in the afternoon, probably around 3:00 and went to a Holiday Inn. There were no rooms left. The guy at the desk explained that he had been full for quite a while and that he had been calling all over town and there were no rooms available,

anywhere. He finally said, “there is a little motel at the bottom of the hill and around the corner. You might try there. They did have a couple of rooms left.”

I headed out the door, as did another guy behind me. We went down the hill and around the corner and found “Wong’s El Rancho Motel.” (Not Juan’s but Wong’s. You can tell by the name it was kind of a multi-cultural experience.) We took the room and the guy behind me got the last room. Shag carpet, vibrating bed, the works. We found out that one of our Air Force Bases (I think Clark Air Force Base) had been evacuated and the whole northwest was filled up with military people in addition to the regular tourists. There was no room in the inn.

Of course, not learning my lesson - some years later we headed to Minneapolis for General Council. Driving the church van again. No problem. We’ll find a room. Nothing! There was no room for us in the Inn, so we found a Good Sam R.V., park, paid the \$15.00 and slept in the van. It’s one of the great memories of our family. Nothing like being homeless to pull a family together.

So I know how Joseph felt when he walked back out to Mary and said, “you aren’t going to believe this, but he said he didn’t have any rooms left. No one in town has a room. I told him you were pregnant and he finally said he had a stable, a barn out back and we could sleep there for the night. I told him I would have to ask you. It’s up to you. We can keep looking, but this may be the best we can find. I know you’re exhausted from the trip. At least you can rest.”

I can see Joseph doing his best to make her warm and comfortable in that stable. “None of this is your fault. Somebody should have given us a room, but this is okay. We’ll be all right.” Suddenly, it’s time. Mary is in labor as Joseph does his best to attend to his wife. We have no record of a midwife or anyone there to help them. Just these two young people, alone in a stable, as the Son of God is born. This young mother takes her new born son, wraps him in a cloth she had and places him in the manger, the feeding trough. It was the best they had. Born in a stable.

Jesus was born in a stable because there was no room in the Inn. No one made room for him and he and his family would not force their way in. Many of us today still have no room for him - no room in our hearts, our lives, our home, our marriage, our business dealings, at school, in the locker room. No room for Jesus and he still doesn’t force his way in. He stands at the door and knocks and we have to open the door and then He will come in and fellowship with us. We need to make room for Jesus in our lives! Why was Jesus born in a stable?

He was making a powerful statement about Himself and His kingdom. This is the birth of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We expect a certain amount of pomp and pageantry with the birth of royalty. But this King was unlike any earthly king. This king was the king who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

By being born in a barn, Jesus revealed to us the heart of a servant. By being born in a barn, Jesus identified with all humanity. Think about the possibilities for a moment. God could have arranged to have him born in a crystal palace somewhere, with all the advantages of power, prestige and wealth. People could come from everywhere to admire it and they would have known someone special was born there. God's son come to earth.

But that wasn't God's plan. He identifies with us in our humanity-he understands our struggles. He was born, like the majority of people on earth, in poverty, not in a hospital - not in a specially designed place- but in a house or a barn. He was born in obscurity, born with nothing so we could all relate to him, so we could all come to him.

The bible says of Jesus, **“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” Hebrews 2:17-18**

Jesus understands us and what we are facing. Wealth and power often isolate a person. The super wealthy and powerful don't know what us common folk are facing. Their wealth and position makes them unapproachable. We're intimidated by someone born in a palace, in wealth, but by being born in a stable, no one is put off by Jesus. No one feels intimidated by the means or location of his birth. He was born in a barn. He is approachable and accessible to everyone. The shepherds show up at his birth. They wouldn't have been allowed in a palace. The security guards would have kept them out. They were a rough looking bunch and smelled like sheep but they were welcomed at the stable. Everyone is welcome where Jesus is.

I found something last night that my Dad had saved, a prayer from an Advent devotional. I don't know who authored this. “O Word by which the whole Creation came to be, we come to you in rags and tags and unembarrassed, because you, too, have chosen not royalty nor wealth nor power but the lowly existence of shepherds. Swaddled and laid in a manger, you are like us. We yearn to be like you.”

Jesus' birth in a barn offers hope for each of us. It's not just for the wealthy, those with

connections, instead the down and out, the lost, the sinners, the broken, the outcast, the lepers, those who never fit, the untouchables of our world, they are free to come. He is born like us so we can be born again and be made like him.

The apostle Paul said **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” 2 Corinthians 8:9**. He wasn't referring to material wealth - he is talking about the riches of glory, which Jesus laid aside to become a baby, humbling himself, becoming a servant so that through his grace we might become children of the most high God! Jesus became poor, born in a barn, emptying himself so we could be saved and have eternal life, so we could have everything. Born in the lowliest of circumstances so we could, through Christ, be seated with him in heavenly places. He was born in a stable, laid in a manger, so we could be born again by his mercy and live forever in his presence and glory in heaven.

Finally, why was Jesus born in a stable? A barn? **Where else would a lamb be born?** It was John the Baptist who declared **“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” John 1:29**. Jesus was the Lamb of God, the sacrificial lamb that was slain to take away our sins forever.

There is an interesting progression in the Scripture concerning the sacrifice. In Genesis 4 the bible tells us about Cain and Abel. Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering but Abel brought a lamb and God accepted his sacrifice. One lamb for one person.

In Exodus, when God was preparing to deliver Israel from the Egyptians, he instructed the people to kill a lamb and put its blood on the doorpost of their home to protect the family. One lamb for a family. Later God gave Israel instructions for the Day of Atonement. One lamb would be slain for the entire nation of Israel. And now, John the Baptist announces Jesus as the lamb of God that takes away the sin not just of one person or one family or one nation but of the whole world!

He is the sacrifice for our sins. He came into this world for this very reason, to give himself as a ransom for our salvation and deliverance. He was born to die so that we might live! To see baby Jesus lying in a manger without seeing the shadow of the cross falling across that nativity scene is to see less than the full picture of the incarnation.

Jesus was approaching the last days before the crucifixion when he said, **“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No, it was for this**

very reason I came to this hour. Father glorify your name!” John 12:27.

Jesus came to the world for this very hour. He came with you and me in mind. He came to be the Savior of the world. Born in a stable, the lamb of God that would take away our sins and the sins of the world.

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Luke 2:10-12.

Think of his birth in that stable. Think of his coming and all he laid aside. Think of Jesus, born in a stable as the lamb that would be sacrificed for our salvation.

Someone said the entire story of redemption is summed up in three lines of Scripture. **“Where is the lamb?” Genesis 22:7** . We need a sacrifice to make atonement for our sin. **“Behold the Lamb!” John 1:29, 36** - Jesus is that once for all sacrifice for our sins. **“Worthy is the Lamb.” Revelation 5:12** - He alone is worthy to redeem us and save us. He alone is worthy to be praised. Let’s give thanks to the Lamb that was slain for our salvation.

Jesus came for you. He gave his life on the cross in your place, to save you and provide forgiveness for your sins. If you’ve not made Jesus the Savior and Lord of your life, why not come to him today. Remember I said at the beginning he would not force his way in. You have to make room for him. Repent and ask him to come into your life, to forgive your sins and save you. Make room for Jesus. Invite him into your life today!