

Sermon for Christmas Eve

I. Luke 2 Places the crèche before us.

A. Wondrous visual detail

1. “wrapped in bands of cloth.”
 1. unbleached muslin?
 2. irregularly torn by Joseph?
 3. wrapped tightly across His shoulders
2. “laid in a manger”
 1. the roughness of the wood
 2. the gnawed places on the edge
 3. his precious indentation in the straw
3. Then away to the shepherds’ fields.
 1. sheep.
 2. cold air; shepherd’s breath
 3. a puny fire
 4. Then BAM, the glory of the Lord in his angelic host.
4. Then the two scenes come together as the shepherd’s fine the Lord of the manger.

II. Luke succeeds because we have seen this scene so many times.

A. The crèche a frequently-encountered form of Christian art.

1. Gift of St. Francis of Assisi, 1223, meant to reassert the Nativity as the reason for Christmas.

B. Crèches I have known teach me lessons.

C. First I knew is at my mother’s house.

1. Gift from St. Mary Magdalene Fayetteville, Tennessee
2. Same box from the attic; same paper towel and sheets of the *Elk Valley Times*
3. Serene white porcelain figures.
4. Like Renaissance statuary; so beautiful, graceful, perhaps a little cold.
5. A lesson that on Christmas, the impassible, eternal God came down.

- D. Fontanini Creches
1. One here in the church; others at homes.
 2. A warmer crèche.
 3. Everyone looks like a nineteenth century Italian peasant.
 4. Mary a very pretty brunette.
 5. Happy, well-fed, emerging from the warm Tuscan palette.
 6. Speak of the warmth of an incarnate God.

- E. Inflatable Scenes from Lowe's.
1. Too often combined with Santa playing golf, etc.

- F. Haitian Scene at our house.
1. Precious wedding gift from a missionary there.
 2. Small figures, everyone as black as they can be.
 3. Colorful clothes and headdresses, as one sees in the market there.
 4. The stable a coconut husk.
 5. No camels; Haitian kings walked or rode a donkey themselves.

III. Haitian Creche Captures the Scene best.

- A. That night not set in serene porcelain.
1. Beautiful, but not like the beauty of Florence and Padua and Sienna in the 13th century.
 2. Not classical splendor and impassibility.
- B. And not a well-fed Tuscan peasant farming family.
1. A terribly young mother.
 2. An old father.
 3. A cold and desperate situation.
 4. Not the beautiful scene we might display on our sideboard.
 5. Or even that we display this night in our church.
- C. Even the Haitian crèche too optimistic.
1. More realistic would be thinner people.
 2. Some skinny dogs.
 3. Plastic flip flops and some cast off tee-shirts from the United States.
 4. And a hungry look in everyone's eyes.

IV. The real wonder of the Nativity is known in the context of a hard, hard world.

1. The real nativity is hard to picture, but it was a hard situation.
2. And that a picture of the human situation.
3. We were far from God's hope for us.
4. Our fall profound; our inability to keep the law justly deserving of God's judgment.
5. God might have left us to our devices, abandoned us to our disobedience.

V. But God came into a cold, cruel world in the life of Jesus.

1. The world still being transformed by the Incarnation.
2. Imperfect, incomplete, but slowly the world will warm to its redemption.
3. And one day, the scene of the whole creation will really be as bright and wondrous as the most romantic, sentimental crèche.
4. When God completes our redemption in Jesus, the whole creation will be full of the glory of God.
5. Christmas the first glimpse of God's great plan.
6. Like a crèche, all to be drawn in, their eyes, hands, hearts drawn to the one in the manger, then on the cross, and finally seated upon his throne.