

Luke 2:6-7

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours because of the Christmas Gospel, Amen.

As I look out this morning, I see some very familiar faces – the ones that are in exactly the same seat week after week. I see some faces of people I kind of recognize because they visit St. Luke's often enough that I should remember their names and with a little help I will remember who you are. There are others here today that I will be introduced to after Church today as Grandpa or Grandma so and so or Uncle or Aunt so and so who are here today to hear their grandkids or nieces and nephews sing and recite their Christmas gospel parts. It is always nice to look out and see so many people sitting in the pews.

But this morning, as we celebrate the Christmas gospel especially as it is going to be presented to us by our Sunday School children, I want to ask each of you a very personal question. Why did you come to Church today or to make it appropriate for this being the celebration of the Gospel?

Theme: Why Did You Come to The Manger?

- 1. God's Plan**
- 2. God's Grace**

There are so many familiar people in this account of Jesus' birth as recorded by Luke. Because it is so familiar, you might recognize very quickly who the key people are in this account. But today, I want us to take a different look at these key people. It is easy to see the finished product as each of these people were a part of that first Christmas as Jesus was born in the manger, but let's dig a little deeper today. I want to ask the question why they came to the manger. With each of these people we will see how God had the perfect plan and how God in his grace fulfilled this plan for the good of those involved.

We will start with Mary and Joseph. We know very well God's plan, **“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register. ⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.”** This was the part of God's plan that got Mary and Joseph to the manger, but just think about how wonderful and powerful God's plan is. Mary was chosen by God to give birth to the Savior through the special virgin birth. That was part of God's plan. Joseph was going to divorce her quietly, but the angel said that Mary was pregnant from God and Joseph trusted God and married her. To make sure that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem, the town of David, as was prophesied in the Old Testament, God had to make sure that Joseph actually was from the town of Bethlehem. This didn't happen by accident.

In the middle of all of this we see God's grace and love evident throughout. It was God's grace that filled the hearts of Mary and Joseph as he led them to believe in the true Savior who would come to be their Savior from sin. It was God's grace that moved their hearts to trust that God was telling them the truth and that the baby to be born would actually save the whole wide world from sin. This is no small task to trust a story so amazing that only God would have been able to think it up and to make it happen.

Secondly we want to talk about the shepherds, as Luke said, **“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.”**⁹ **An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.**¹⁰ **But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”**¹¹ **Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.**¹² **This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”**¹³ **Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,**¹⁴ **“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”**¹⁵ **When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”**¹⁶ **So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.”** That night started just like any other night. Take your sheep out and watch and protect them through the night. But God's plan put a little wrinkle on their night. A great company of the heavenly host announced that a Savior has been born to you. You will find him wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger. God's plan included angels and a sign to help them find the manger. How many stables were there in Bethlehem that they would have to search? I'm not sure, but there would only be one stable where you would hear the sound of a newborn baby who was wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger.

Again we see the grace of God at work. The faith of these shepherds to run and see this baby that has been born. This baby who was the long-awaited Messiah. This baby who would be their Savior from sin. They could have stayed out in the field, thinking this was all a dream and we will wake up in the morning and everything will be back to normal, but they didn't. Their hearts were filled with fire as they ran to worship the Savior of the world.

I know the wise men didn't see Jesus in the manger, but they did come and worship Jesus in Bethlehem. Maybe we could put a littler asterisk next to their names as they visited Jesus quite a bit later in a house in Bethlehem, but we can ask the same question, why did they come and see Jesus? God's plan included a star which led these men to not only the right part of the world, but to the right country and eventually to the right stable in the small town of Bethlehem. That is some sort of spiritual GPS that God had used as he guided and led these men to worship their Savior and King.

Looking at the wise men also shows God's grace in abundance. How in the world would these men from the East know anything about a Messiah who would be born literally thousands of miles away? How would they know about a King who would be the Savior of the world? God's grace had worked in their hearts at some time and in some place as the message of a Savior was preached to them. Maybe it was through some of the Israelites who were exiled to the country of Babylon around 500 years earlier who preached to the ancestors of these wise men. Maybe it was God's prophets who went and preached, like Jonah who went to the foreign city of Nineveh and through the power of God's Word changed the hearts of these people to repent and they were the ancestors of these men. We will never know the

complete answer, but we will know with certainty that God's grace was at work in the hearts of the wise men as they came to the manger to worship the King of Kings.

That bring us to the final group of people we want to talk about and that is you and me. Why did you come to the manger today? Why did you get dressed up, some of you rather early this morning, to come to St. Luke's Lutheran Church? God had a plan didn't he? Maybe his plan was coming to St. Luke's to hear the presenting of the Christmas gospel through someone you know who is sitting up front. Maybe you are a member of St. Luke's and God's plan was fulfilled as he made sure that the worship times of 7:45 and 10:15 worked in your schedule. This plan might have been started years ago when you were baptized into God's family of believers and you would never miss a chance to hear God's Word and especially a service that reminds us who was laid in that manger, Jesus my Savior from sin. Maybe some of you are just visiting today and just happen to be visiting on a day when we are talking about the birth of Jesus. There are lots of different ways that God brings us into his house of worship.

And God grace has also worked in our hearts just like we said about Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the wise men, God's grace is so very evident in our hearts and lives. We wouldn't be here at all if it wasn't for God's grace that worked faith in our hearts and compels us to hear again and again the message of sin and God's answer to that sin which first came in the form of a baby born in a manger.

So back to the question, why did we come to the manger? Why did you come to God's house to hear God's saving Word? Upon a closer examination, maybe we don't really have all that great of an answer, but it is our prayer that God will continue to work in your hearts and lives. In the end, it isn't us who do the work of coming to the manger, but it was our good and gracious God who works out his perfect plan to call us by the gospel and to fill our hearts to come and worship the Savior who was born in the manger – Not just on this special day when these young children of God wonderfully and joyfully present God's grace to us, but on that Sunday in the middle of July when you might want to sleep in or enjoy the nice weather rather than sit inside on a Sunday morning. Thank goodness God has not given up on us. He will carry on this work to completion - and we thank our God for that. Amen