

Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
Ephesians 3:1-12
Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon January 8th, 2023

The Inclusivity of the Nativity

Most of us have probably taken down the Christmas tree and decorations since January 8th is technically a couple days after the day of Epiphany, which marks the end of the Christmas season.

Of course, with Christmas becoming so secularized, many of us put the tree and decorations up much earlier than December 24th, and then take everything down earlier than January 6th. Maybe even as early as December 26th. Because we feel what we like to call Christmas fatigue.

Well, I invite you to put the Christmas fatigue aside and take a moment to look back on this Christmas season and remember a nativity you saw. Maybe, you had a nativity as part of your set of decorations in your home. Or maybe you saw a nativity at a church or at the mall or at a friend or family member's home.

One thing I love about a nativity is that this picture, this model, this decoration is reflective of God's inclusive nature (**Image One**: nativity).

On Christmas Eve, we reflected on Luke's Christmas story about a God who appears in the baby Jesus to Mary and Joseph (**Image One**). Two people who are part of the everyday crowd. Joseph is not a son of a High Priest or part of the nobility. Mary isn't secretly rich. Joseph is a carpenter. Mary is a teenager. They are like you and I.

On Christmas Eve, we reflected on Luke's Christmas story about a God who appears in the baby Jesus to shepherds who live in poverty (**Image One**). No royal guard. No Sadducees or Pharisees gathered around. Just shepherds standing and witnessing this great event.

On Christmas Eve, we reflected on Luke's Christmas story about a God who appears in the baby Jesus to animals (**Image One**). Or this is what we assume since Jesus is born in a stable, and laid in a trough. Animals who many see as less valuable or significant than humans. Animals that many of us include in our nativities.

On Christmas Eve, we reflected on Luke's Christmas story about a God who appears in the baby Jesus to angels (**Image One**). Now, according to Luke's Christmas story, the angels don't appear at the stable. But this doesn't stop many of us from putting angels in our nativity.

On Epiphany, we get to the second half of Matthew's Christmas story where these Wise men, or what many scholars have come to see as astrologers, come to visit the baby Jesus (**Image One**).

Now, biblically this probably happens later in Jesus' infancy. Not at the stable. But again, this doesn't stop us from adding these astrologers to our nativities.

And one thing scholars agree on is that the astrologers are more than likely Gentiles who have come to pay homage to Jesus, the new King. Gentiles.

So, let's put this all together in one big nativity scene (**Image One**). We have regular everyday people like you and I, animals, poor shepherds, angels, and Gentiles standing in the presence of God.

The nativity scene we have created from our perceptions of these two Christmas stories reflect God's inclusive nature. An inclusive nature that includes Gentiles along with Israel. Members of one body. An inclusive nature that includes the wealth of astrologers who could afford to give Jesus expensive gifts, as well as, the poor shepherds who couldn't afford such lavish gifts, choosing to share this good news with all they see as their gift to Jesus. An inclusive nature that values the animals, as well as, the angels. Not just humanity. An inclusive nature that includes you and I, the everyday people.

The nativity we have created may not be always so biblically accurate, especially in its chronology, but it does reflect God's inclusive vision for God's creation.

Which in a lot of ways is the purpose of Christ's birth. To reconnect God's people to their calling to be a light to the nations (**Image Two**: the Bethlehem star). A light similar to the light of a star that guides the gentile astrologers to Bethlehem to stand in the presence of God through Christ Jesus.

Jesus' birth story, whether Luke's version or Matthew's, talks about this common theme. Jesus has come to live out God's hospitality and inclusive nature in the world.

We will see this baby grow into a person who touches people with this hospitality and inclusivity wherever he goes. From spending a lot of time around the poor. Showing them that God values them even when the rest of their community is incapable of doing this. To spending a lot of time listening and talking to women in the same way he talks with men. Showing these women that they matter too. From spending a lot of time listening to Gentiles, and helping them meet their needs. Showing them that God includes them in God's family. To spending time going into the marginalized communities like Leper colonies to show them compassion. To heal them. Showing them that they too are welcome in God's community.

The nativity (**Image One**), the two Christmas stories, is God's thesis statement for the entire biblical story. God is an inclusive God who longs for all of us to be included in God's vision, in God's world.

The Christmas season, the nativities we proudly display in our homes, move us to live out this inclusive nature. To value the marginalized people in our community. To value those who live in poverty. To value women, children, animals. To value people of every ethnicity, gender, color, orientation.

The Christmas season, the nativities we proudly display in our homes, also reassure us that we are valued. We are welcome. And feeling valued encourages us to be a light to the nations (**Image Two**).

Let us pray, loving God, like the nativities that sit in our homes, help us live out your inclusive nature in our ministry, in our lives, in our world. **Amen.**

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