

“Rediscover Christmas: The Difference Jesus Makes”

Sermon preached by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXTS: Matthew 2:9-12, Luke 2:16-20

MANUSCRIPT:

Several years ago, I remember reading a wonderful story from Ron Hutchcraft. He told about a mining camp called “Roaring Camp” in the Old West. It was really an out-of-control place. In fact – it was such a wild place – they had even driven the sheriff out of town. So, there was no law and order. The women of the town got fed up and they all left too – I mean, this was no place for a woman. But one woman stayed... good ol’ Sal. Now I’m not sure why she stayed. But one day she had a baby – but nobody was sure who the baby’s father was. Sadly, Sal died in childbirth. And that left the miners with a dilemma. Here was a little, helpless baby – and who was going to take care of him?

Well, one of the miners volunteered to have him stay at his cabin. He wasn’t quite prepared to take care of a baby...but he got an old cardboard box and put some rags around him. But it just wasn’t right. That was no place for a baby.

Well, one of the other miners was getting ready to go into San Francisco to get some supplies – so he offered to get a redwood cradle for the baby. He brought it back to the cabin and they placed the baby in it...and that looked a lot better.

But that cradle was sitting on the dirtiest floor. It just wasn’t right. Soon, the baby would want to crawl on that floor. They needed to clean the place up. So, they scrubbed the floor – and it looked spic and span clean – probably for the first time ever. And then they thought, “While we are at it, maybe we should also clean the windows.” And so, they did. But once they finally had clean windows – and the sun was shining through them – it showed how filthy everything else in the house was. So, they all pitched in and cleaned that cabin from top to bottom. It looked better than it had ever looked.

But there were other things that happened in that town after the baby was born. For example, Roaring Town was a loud, partying kind of place – 24 hours, 7 days a week. And babies need to sleep. So, they decided to establish quiet hours. Pretty soon the miners were going around doing things quietly. You could even see them reminding each other, “Sh-h, the baby is sleeping.”

There were other things that were different. Like the new things that were in the general store. Men were buying mirrors and razors, clean shirts and soap. They all wanted to look their best.

What had happened to that town? A baby had come to roaring camp – and everyone had changed.

2, 000 years ago, there was a baby born to a place that was just like roaring town – Bethlehem in Judea. It was a pretty horrible place to live in a lot of ways. It was a Roman occupied land and the rulers governed with a heavy hand – and placed heavy taxes on the people. In fact, at the time when this baby was born there was a census taking place and everyone was returning to the town of their ancestry, to be counted. It was a crazy place. There were no rooms to be had anywhere. It wasn't a still, silent night like our Christmas carols depict. Rather, it was a crazy time with the noise of animals and people everywhere.

It was during this wild time that a baby was born. Because the parents couldn't find a place to stay – the baby was delivered in a stable and was placed in a feeding trough – a place where animals were fed. It wasn't the right place for a baby. Just imagine what the floor of that stable was like. It was a messy place – and yet it was a perfect place for the Savior of the world to be born, because He came to save us from the mess of sin that we find ourselves in.

His birth changed everything . In fact, it changed history and how we mark time. We say “B.C.” – before Christ and “A.D.” – in the year of our Lord.

And His birth changes everything for you and for me. God sent Jesus – as a baby – to grow and walk among us and then to die for our sins. He came to be save us – right here in the midst of our roaring camp...that roaring camp of sin. Inside of us is that messy room of anger and bitterness, worry and fear. That restlessness and loneliness --- that hole in our heart that can never be fully satisfied. God loves us enough to reach out to us – to send His only Son Jesus to save us from the roaring camp of our lives.

And once we let Him into our lives --- making Him the Master and Lord of our lives --- we are changed! We can feel His peace even in the midst of worry and can find hope in the midst of sorrow. We are better people because of the birth of Jesus in our lives.

There once was a man who had kept his marriage vows rather loosely. He had thought little about his past and had not the slightest interest in the future. He had spent the first years of his marriage mainly on the road making money.

"But one night," he said, "I got turned around---the night I walked into the hospital room and held my little baby in my arms for the first time and realized that she was part of me even if she was better than I deserved. I said to myself, 'You are going to have to stop your foolishness and start living like somebody, because she's somebody.'"

The birth of that baby summoned forth the best in that's man's humanity, laid hold of his life in a manner that could only be called rebirth. And what about us? How will we respond to this tiny gift? Because He is somebody, are we going to start living like somebody? Because he reaches out to us in love, will we respond in love? Will we have a rebirth this Christmas when we gaze in wonder and awe at this beautiful Christ child? Will the birth of Jesus make a difference in you?

Pastor Bill Riechart asks the question: *“Do you have a manger set up in your home or on your front lawn? Often we look into those manger scenes and observe what appears to be a*

*tranquil and placid event. We look at the cherubic looking Christ child in the feeding trough and we sing, "sleep in heavenly peace". We call it a "Silent Night". But it was anything but silent. The arrival of Jesus was anything but peaceful, quiet and subdued. **It was a REVOLUTION!**"*²

Think about it – when Jesus came as a baby into our world – He kind of shook up the place. Think about the story in our Scripture reading today in Matthew 2 about King Herod. He really felt threatened when he heard that the newborn King of the Jews. Look at verse 3 in Matthew 2. It says that King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard the news, as was everyone in Jerusalem. His presence seems to startle and disturb people. As Pastor Reichart says, *"His birth shook up the status quo. His arrival ...shook the kingdoms of the earth of their fragile foundations."* In fact – His arrival would start a revolution that would change the face of the world....changing people from the world's ways to God's ways.

And literally that's what happens to us when we let the Christ child come in and change us. Our life can never be the same. In fact, there will be a revolution in the way we live, the way we talk, the way we relate to others.

Pastor Reichart says: *"There will be shifts in your priorities. Shifts in your values. Shifts in your desires. Shifts in your heart. Shifts in your motivations. But let's be more concrete and practical: There will be shifts in the way you love your spouse. Shifts in your checkbook. Shifts in how you see and treat other people at work. Shifts in your thought life."*²

We stand at the manger, admiring the beauty of the child and marvel that God would reach out to us in such a way. But we can't just let it end there...admiring the baby and then walking away unchanged. This young baby, lying in a manger, comes with a claim upon us, evoking a response from us.

Think back to those first visitors to see the baby Jesus. In Luke 2, we read the story about the shepherds coming, in response to the angels' announcement. Verses 16-20 says:

¹⁶So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The shepherds saw the baby Jesus and then they went to tell others. They didn't keep the news to themselves. In a way, you can say that they were the first evangelists, telling others the good news of Jesus and how He had made a difference in their lives. Can you dare to follow in their footsteps? Can you kneel at the manger and then rise and tell others what a difference that makes in your lives? Not only to those in your church family – but to everyone you meet?

And what about those wise men? We read in Matthew 2:9-12

⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east^[e] went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw

the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

When the wise men saw the baby Jesus, they were overjoyed! They bowed down and worshiped him and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then they went home by another route –went home a different way because *they* were different . Their lives were changed. But what about *our* lives? Are we affected at all by seeing the baby Jesus? Are we living each and every day following Him and serving Him? Are we making worship a priority in our lives – not just on Sundays, but every day? Are we giving of our time and talent and treasure to honor Him? Are we living in hope and peace because we know Jesus? Does the experience of kneeling at the manger of the Christ child make any difference at all in your life?

All throughout Advent, we have been “ReDiscovering Christmas”. We have discovered once again that because of Christmas we can keep on taking one step at a time with hope, even in times of uncertainty because we are never walking alone. We have the gift of Emmanuel – God with Us. We can stand firm in peace, even in the midst of our struggles and storms, because we have been given the gift of the Prince of Peace. Because of Christmas, we can choose joy in the midst of discouragements and those things in life that try to rob our joy. Because the joy of the Lord is our strength – we can choose worship over worry, devotion over dread and faith over fear. All because Jesus is our Joy. And as we discover the birth of Jesus, we can truly love our neighbors, despite our differences....because God is love and that is the greatest gift of Christmas.

Hope – peace – joy and love – have you rediscovered these once again this Christmas?

This year, let Christ be born anew in your heart. No one can ever kneel at the manger and walk away unchanged.

INVITATION

Does he make a difference in your life? Are you ready to accept Him into your heart and let Him have the lead? Are you ready to unite with this part of Christ's body and serve Him through the church?

Today is the day to put your life in His hands....and to find His peace for your roaring camp. Won't you come now and make your decision for Christ, as we stand and sing.

RESOURCES

¹Ron Hutchcraft, “Roaring Camp Christmas.” <http://www.hutchcraft.com/downloadable-resources/free-downloads/a-roaring-camp-christmas>)

²Bill Reichart. Provocative church, www.provocativechurch.com/2007/12/christmas-revolution.html)