

This morning in Sunday LIFT, we studied this passage and shared where we see Emmanuel, God with us, in this text. This passage is such a tiny part of Luke's comprehensive telling of the nativity story, it may be hard to see more than one place. The most obvious place is the actual birth of Jesus.

Notice, this is Luke 2. Luke Chapter 1 really begins the birth story of Christ by giving a lot of background information that sets the stage for the birth. Luke begins with the angel Gabriel foretelling the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. Mary and Elizabeth conceive, and then Mary visits Elizabeth for three months. Mary sings her infamous Magnificat, her hymn of praise. John the Baptist is born, and then his father, Zechariah prophesies about the role of Jesus and his son John. All of this takes place in Chapter 1.

All of this extensive detail leads up to the actual birth of Jesus, which was very simplistic in its telling. Luke was obviously a writer. He uses many literary devices throughout his gospel and the book of Acts. One rhetorical device in this part of the story is his use of contrast.

We see this with the differences between John the Baptist, who prepares the way, and Jesus who is the way. The younger Mary with the older Elizabeth. Mary's hymn of praise with Zechariah's prophesy. All of this leads to the contrast in the birth story of Christ. The oppressive emperor with the baby King. Joseph from the royal line of King David with the simple stable stay. The Son of God's birth happened so nonchalantly when one might think there would be more pomp and circumstance.

Luke said, "The time came for her to deliver her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son" (6-7). The time came, and he was born. It was time for God to enter our world in human form, and he just slipped in barely unnoticed. Because God does that. When God joins us, we tend to expect trumpets blaring, an angel chorus singing Hallelujah, heralds announcing God's arrival with confetti and fanfare. That is rarely how it works. God doesn't bulldoze his way into our lives.

God slips into our lives very similarly as Luke's portrayal of the birth of Jesus. No frills. Very practical. We make our very long journey to Bethlehem, and when the time comes, he is born. Something new is birthed within us when we are ready.

The baby Jesus came at the worst possible time – "there was no place for them in the inn" (v.7) nor the world. With Luke's use of contrast, we see that there's an opposition to Christ. Luke shows there was not a place for Jesus in their world. An oppressive government, required registration for taxation, overcrowding. In a world of abusive power and violence, there seems like there was no place for one who brings peace, hope, joy, and love. But, that's the best time – when we need Christ the most. Because the world lacked those things, because of this opposition, God was born into the world to bring these gifts. When there's no room for Christ in our lives, we need him to be born in us, to make room in our lives.

Mary made room for Jesus. She found a place for him – the manger. It was a small place, but it was open and ready to receive Jesus. That's all that is needed. The place for Jesus in our lives grows as the

child grows. Once we find the manger in our lives and create a vacancy for Christ, the time comes and the child is born into our hearts and lives. We are ready to receive.

In this text, God is with us in the manger. And, sometimes our mangers are messy. Our personal struggles mixed with the world's hurts can make messy lives. Jesus was placed directly in the manger. "God doesn't abandon us in our mess but enters into it with us. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, in whatever mess we may be experiencing."¹ Jesus wants to meet us in our mess, so he can help us. We don't have to make things neat and tidy. We just have to make room.

Even a small opening, a messy manger, gives Christ the place to bring his gifts we so desperately need. There seems like there is no place for Jesus in our world. Churches are declining; shootings are rising. Immigrant families are separated from their children who live in cages. We focus more on growing our bank accounts than giving to those in need. We have the same problems and busyness that leaves no vacancy for Jesus in our lives.

When we make room for God in our lives, we receive the gifts of peace, hope, joy, and love that Christ brings. And the world receives these gifts through us. When the Christ child is born in us and through us, the world is transformed and the opposition is reconciled.

Is there a place in your heart and life for the Christ child? Is it time for him to be born within you?

God of Peace, Hope, Joy and Love --
We welcome you. We invite you to be born in us. We want to make room for you in our hearts and lives. Show us where we need to create a vacancy for you. Give us the courage to honestly look at our messy mangers and allow you in anyway. You came so many years ago to an opposing world and it seems that our world is just the same. We need your gifts of peace, hope, joy and love now more than ever. Help us to find a place for you so the world can be a place of peace, a place for hope, a place filled with joy, and a place to love. O come, o come Emmanuel. Amen.

¹ Trevor Hudson, *Pauses for Advent*, 65.