

It's a Wonderful life 2

A Time to Prepare For Christ

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Introduction: What are you doing to get ready for Christmas? We spent our snow day getting up our Christmas Tree. My 86 year old great uncle was making candy last week. Maybe, we need to return to scripture to see what we need to do to ready, look at Luke 2:8-10: ***And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.***

The angel said, that Christmas would bring great joy. . .for all people. Really? For many people, getting ready for the Christmas season seems more of a hassle than a source of happiness. God wanted Christmas to be part of a wonderful life. But for many it's a source of Stress! They feel pressure, not pleasure, when it comes to Christmas. It's a duty, not a delight. They endure Christmas rather than enjoy it.

The primary reason is we have made Christmas into a time to impress people we don't even like, instead of about getting ready for Christ! We have made Christmas about material goods instead of the spiritual blessing of Christ. Today I have a clip from the movie it's a Wonderful life by Frank Capra, on how those in Bedford falls were getting ready for Christmas.

Show Clip

It's a Wonderful life is a great movie-but has some lousy theology especially about angels and God! But in this clip we saw some of it's best thoughts about God and getting ready for Christmas. The people of Bedford Falls ready for Christmas by spiritually blessing George Bailey by praying For Him. Clarence the Angel gets ready by learning about George Bailey. But the best line of all is: To help a man you have to

know something about him.

The entire reason for Christmas is the love of God. God loves you so much that he came to earth as a human so you could get to know him and learn to trust him and love him back. Theologians call this the Incarnation. God became one of us, a human being, we could understand what God is really like.

God came also to know our struggles and to lift us out of the miry pit. But most in Jesus day, missed his birth. Why? I believe they had no room or time for baby Jesus! Why do we miss the reason for the season Jesus? Because we have no room or time for Jesus. So let's look today at the second ingredient to a wonderful life Preparing for Christ.

Find a Room Luke 2:6-8

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. Luke 2:6-8

When it came time for Mary to deliver the baby, the Greek of Luke's text says, "she wrapped him in cloth and laid him in a corn crib, as there was no room in the guest room." Yes, you heard me right. Luke does not say there was no room in the inn. Luke has a different Greek word for inn (*pandeion*), which he trots out in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The word he uses here (*kataluma*) is the very word he uses to describe the room in which Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples — the guest room of a house.

Archeology shows that houses in Bethlehem and its vicinity often had caves as the back of the house where they kept their prized ox or beast of burden, lest it be stolen. The guest room was in the front of the house, the animal shelter in the back, and Joseph and Mary had come too late to get the guest room, so the relatives did the best they could by putting them in the back of the house. Family is the central role of Jewish life. Yet either Joseph's family or the Guest did not value expectant Mary enough to find room for them. Because there was no room-they missed the birth of the Messiah!

There are many possible reasons you might feel uneasy or lonely or even depressed during the Christmas season. You may dread spending time with oddball relatives. Maybe relationships are strained and uncomfortable in your family. Maybe you don't have anyone to be with this Christmas. Christmas may remind you of losses or hurts or how things have changed. You may have a Religious background that does not include Christmas, or you may have no faith at all; watching others celebrate may make you feel uneasy. Maybe you're just exhausted and worn out from all that's happened in your life this past year. More than likely, it comes down to this; we have no room in our hearts for the Christ Child because it is filled with others' cares and concerns. Know this Christmas, God cares deeply about how you feel, and so do I.

Bethlehem was about the size of Elbert, and we don't have a shred of archaeological evidence that there ever was a wayfarer's inn in that little village in Jesus' day. All this silliness about 'no room at the Holiday Inn' for the holy family or the world giving Jesus the cold shoulder is not at all what Luke is talking about. It's a story about no inn in the room! It's a story about a family making do when more relatives than expected suddenly show up on the doorstep. It's a story most of us can relate to in one way or another. Jesus was born in his relative's home, in the place where they kept the most precious of their animals. One can well imagine the smell.

It is a reminder to find room for the Messiah takes work. If we are the guest-it means we must first give up our privileged spot. If we are the family privileged to have Mary and Joseph knocking on our door to find a room-we will have to say no to other requests to make room. We will have to find additional bedding. To find room for the Messiah always take preparation and forethought-Are we leaving enough quiet to see the wonder once again? Are we able to give up our hurts -our disappointments so we can have enough room for Jesus?

Muck out the Stall

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger Luke 2:8

Have you ever asked yourself what kind of preparations had to be made for that first Christmas, and realized there is no mention in any of the gospels of who got to be the “official” stall cleaner. Think about it. On the night that overflow guests arrived to use the animals stabling place as a birthing place, there had to be a stall cleaner. And what does a stall cleaner do? The task is known as “mucking out.” For a good Jewish Mother to place baby Jesus in a Manger-I am certain she insisted in the mucking out of the stable.

Every one of you here knows the meaning of that phrase, “mucking out.” It is every bit as nasty as it sounds, the nastiness only less or more depending upon how long it has been since the last muck out.” Considering the hygiene habits in the first century I’ m guessing the muck out accomplished before Mary and Joseph moved into their stall, aka birthing center, was on the high side of horrible. But prep time, cleaning out time, is necessary if we are going open up space, transform space, re-envision space in our lives for the miracle that is Christmas.

Are you not happy unless everything is tidy and perfect?

The Good Housekeeping motto has always been, “A place for everything and everything in its place.” Not. Dump that. Life is all about thriving in the midst of chaos. Stuff happens. You are not going to have a zip-lock freezer bag to put it into.

Mary got pregnant. Joseph married her anyway.

Tiberius decided to call for a census when Mary was in her final weeks of pregnancy. A very pregnant Mary and a very worried Joseph traveled to Bethlehem.

And God was there, even in the midst of the most imperfect birthing conditions. Can you imagine Mary saying to Joseph: “I’m not having my baby except under the most perfect of conditions?”

God is with us. God doesn’t need vacuumed out “space bags” in order to let us accommodate more “stuff” in our lives. God will find a way to get a **stable** ready for all our needs.

We need to Muck out two issues in our life to ready ourselves for Christmas.

1) Here is one of the biggest stall cleanings we all need this year: we need to clean out despair.

This is a tough holiday season for so many families in so many ways. The nightly news is not fun to watch. The economy seems to be about to crash and burn. Wall Street has already collapsed ... on the second week of September. Acts of terrorism, even when they are happening far away, feel like they are at our front door. The mayors of Mumbai and New York City now feel like

blood-brothers.

The truth is that in this next year we are looking eye-to-eye at some pretty dire situations.

Failures of economic systems (the government bail-outs just keep coming, and we're bailing out with borrowed money and time)

Failures of moral systems (as the atheistic sign of hate next to manger scene at Washing state makes clear.)

Failures of political systems (from Thailand to Pakistan to Bagdad to India)

Failures of environmental systems (as the threat of global warming becomes the reality of global climate changes)

But despair pushes out Jesus . Despairing is letting the world's brokenness cripple us, instead of embracing the birth of Immanuel-who is forever new, rebirthing, redeeming, giving of love in this world.

2. Sin has to mucked out to make Room For Jesus. Look in Luke 2:11 in the NASB: today in the city of David there has been born for you a ^(I)Savior, who is ^{(C)(I)}Christ ^(K)the Lord. Notice the savior born in Bethlehem is for you. He came for your benefit. He is your Personal Savior.

Savior implies the saving of something? So have you asked what do you need saving from?

When people think of salvation, they often have a very narrow concept. They treat salvation as fire insurance-a get out hell pass-a ticket to heaven. But from Creation to Christ's birth to the Cross God had so much more in mind. God's gift of salvation is three dimensional; you past, your present, and your future. Jesus saves you from something. Jesus saves you for something. Jesus saves you by something.

Our natural inclination is to want our own way instead of God's way. This tendency to make wrong choices instead of right ones is called sin. The middle letter of sin is I, and whenever I place myself at the center of life, I sin. It is any attitude, apathy or action that denies God his rightful place as first in my life.

Sin is our greatest problem, and it has infected everyone! You and I sin every day-with our words, our thoughts, and our actions. The Bible says, "***Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins.***"*Romans 3:23* Nobody bats a thousand.

The preacher does not measure up to his own imperfect standards, much less to God perfect ones. This is not a popular concept, but then, it is not exactly news either! Unless you are in total denial, you know that you make wrong choices all the times. None of us is sinless, and we know it.

Our actions, both conscious and unconscious, shout out, "I don't need God!" I want to run my own life, and I want to be my own God. I think I know what's best for me more than God does, so I am going to do what I feel like doing. Every time you do what you want to do instead of what God tells you to do, you are acting like you are God. That war with God creates enormous conflict and stress in your mind, on your body, and in your relationships.

This attitude of prideful self-will causes you to be disconnected from God and feel distant from him. This focus on self is one reason during Christmas, God can seem a million miles away. It is also why your prayers seem to bounce off the wall. If you feel far from God, guess who moved? God didn't move. The Bible Says, "***The trouble is that your sins have cut you off from God.***" To find the wonder of Christmas we must muck out hate and practice a little love. To See Christ we must sweep out impurity and embrace self-control.

Make a permanent place For Jesus

After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! 11 They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Matthew 2:9-11

These verse in Matthew caused Dallas Schroeder to ask me why did Joseph rent or move into a House, instead of returning to Nazareth. We must initially say it was God's plan. Second, after looking at the texts involved in understanding this vers-I do not believe they rented a house. From Luke's use of the word for guest Chamber-I think the best understanding of Luke 2 and Matthew 2; is the guest has left so Joseph and Mary have moved from the manger to the guest room.

But why did they not return quickly to Nazareth? May I suggest practicality. First, Mary needed to Recover. Then there was the issue of the distance we are talking about; The mileage from Jerusalem

to Nazareth and Capernaum and vice versa is: Approximately 120 miles (193 km)! The most direct route would be about 90 miles, however this would be through Samaria. This was an area between Jerusalem and the Galilee area to the north. The Jews as a whole hated the Samaritans and they the Jews. Travel through Samaria was to be avoided because of the mountainous conditions and the racial hatred. The travel route was from Jerusalem down to the Jordan valley 'the Jericho Road'. Then across the Jordan River into the area know as Perea (part of present day Jordan and once a part of Israel with two and a half tribes of Israel living there). One would then go north on the east side of the River Jordan on up into Decpolis still on the east side of the River Jordan. Just below the Sea of Galilee the route crossed back over the River Jordan and then split. One route went on Northwest to Nazareth the other route passing along the West side of the Sea of Galilee past Tiberias and on through Magdala to Capernaum. Both these routes are about the same mileage. While Bethlehem is a mere five miles to the south of Jerusalem.

That's Important because immediately after birth, a woman is considered ritually to be separat sexually from the husband for two weeks. In the days of the [Temple](#), when considerations of ritual purity were more important, a woman was considered partially impure for an additional period of 33 days after the birth of a male child. So for 47 days travel would be more complicated for Mary and Joseph back to Nazareth so they chose to stay.

In the Jewish mind the first and best of all things belong to God. This is true even of the firstborn of children. Originally, it was intended that the firstborn would serve as the [priests](#) and [Temple](#) functionaries of Israel; however, after the incident of the Golden Calf, in which the tribe of [Levi](#) did not participate, G-d chose the tribe of Levi over the firstborn for this sacred role. This is explained in Num. 8:14-18. However, even though their place has been taken by the Levites, the firstborn still retain a certain degree of sanctity, and for this reason, they must be redeemed. A firstborn son must be redeemed after he reaches 31 days of age. Luke 21 tells us this redemption for Jesus was done at the temple. The temple was only five miles from Bethlehem And 120 miles from Nazareth!

Because of the long travel required by the Census and the demands of the Jewish law the practical choice for Joseph and Mary was to stay a minimum of 31 days to redeem Jesus and maximum of 47 days so Mary would be pure. Josephs and Mary's Relatives who did not value them enough to initially give them the guest room. Now needed to make a more permanent residence for Baby Jesus!

We are faced with the same decision: We may not initially value the presence of Jesus-but once we understand who he is- most of us know we must now make a permanent place for the Christ Child in their heart!

Guilt is the mental price we pay for violating our God-given consciences. WE know that if we break a law, we have to pay a penalty. When we break God's universal moral laws, some one has to pay for that too. But God, out of His deep love for us, sent Jesus that first Christmas to solve our sin problem. ***"The reward for sin is death, but the gift that God freely gives is everlasting life found in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** Romans 6:23 GW

When Jesus died on the cross, he paid for everything you've ever done wrong or will ever do wrong in the future. How great is that? It has been called the great exchange, and you and I get the better end of the deal. ***"God took the sinless Christ and poured into him our sins. Then, in exchange, he poured God's goodness into us."*** 2 Corinthians 5:21 TLB

What's the catch you ask? Simply to give a permanent place in your heart for Jesus to live and breathe His righteousness into you.

Conclusion: Do you have room for Jesus? It may mean of course that room has to be made for Him. Some guests will have to be sent packing and turned out. And I'll leave it with you to know

who such guests are. I can tell you that Jesus does not want to share room with such characters as Mr. despair, Mrs. selfishness, and Mr. Sin. They will have to go to make room for Jesus.

I may also tell you that you do not have to worry about the poor condition of your heart. By no means should you do a whitewash job on it, or decorate it in any way before He makes His entrance. Remember, Jesus was quite pleased to be born in a stable. And I can hardly imagine that this stable was quickly whitewashed and decorated before Mary gave birth. Likewise Jesus is quite pleased to enter into your heart, as long as it is open to receive Him.

And how may your heart be open for Jesus? By letting Him see what is there, without hiding anything from Him. The stable where Jesus was born was no closed shop, but an open place, so that the person coming by, could readily see what was in it.

If you have never made Jesus your savior and you are ready to reject sin, to be put under water to rise a life of following him then come up front as we stand to sing. If you are looking for a church family to share in the experience of making room for Jesus in the crowded human heart- and have been baptized also come up front as we stand to sing.