

Remnant Life Church
12.11.22
A Christmas Playlist – Away in a Manger
Luke 2:1-7

Last Sunday we introduced a Christmas Playlist

- Four well-known Christmas songs that all have a much deeper significance than just favorite songs we have sung all of our lives this time of year
- But these 4 songs, though included in every area of Christmas (the mall, the radio, TV specials, etc...) all point to Jesus

Our first song on the list was *The First Noel*

- What happened that first Christmas night?
- The night that Jesus was born
- The angels appeared to a group of shepherds and told them to go to Bethlehem and see the Christ-child
 - They obeyed
 - They told everyone they came across on the way home
 - The prophecies of Jesus were beginning to be fulfilled
- And this is the message the angels brought on that First Noel
 - Do not set your heart, your mind, and your emotions of happiness
 - Happiness comes and goes
 - Instead set it on the joy of the Lord
 - **Neh 8:10** - ...*the joy of the LORD is your strength.*
 - Circumstances – dealt with in joy – the strength of the Lord – to deal with the circumstances – in joy – providing strength...
 - The Cycle of Joy

And that Good News should also in praise – at attitude of praise to God

And that Good News of the First Noel does one more thing – it invites us in

Song #2 on our Christmas Playlist – *Away in a Manger*

- This song was first published in the late 19th-century (late 1800s)
- Now it was reported for nearly 100 years that the German Reformist Martin Luther was the author of the lyrics
 - On March 2, 1882, the first publication of the first verse was introduced as being written by Martin Luther as a chorus to sing to his children
 - Over the next 2 years in two separate publications the same statement was made attributing the text to Luther and “it is still sung by many German mothers to soothe their children.”
 - It is likely connected with the 400th anniversary of the reformer's birth in 1483
 - The melody of the song we sing today was placed with the words in 1887 by James R. Murray
 - It has also been shown to have not been written by Luther

In researching this song, I did come across several article regarding the useage and importance of the song

- One in particular saying that this song was the worst Christmas song ever because of how faulty the theology was
 - Now, it would appear that the author was attempting to be humorous, and the article was written tongue-in-cheek
- But the message of the song should not be missed or covered over by criticism
- The message is this – The Son of God was not born in an ivory tower of royalty, but in a lowly animal shelter, in the midst of a people who desperately needed a Savior

READ – Luke 2:1-7

- Katerina and I love to eat out at nice restaurants
- With prices today we don't do it as often as we used to but many times, after I perform a wedding and she is with me, we will look for a nice place to eat
 - We did that this pat week
 - On Tuesday I had performed a small wedding at the Hotel Hershey – one of our favorite places
 - There are 3 locations on site that we enjoy eating but on Tuesdays, all three are closed, or not open until later
 - That was disappointing
 - So, we came home, changed, and went to Hoss's
 - Nothing wrong with Hoss's but it ain't the Hotel Hershey!
 - Now, consider the disappointment and frustration of Mary and Joseph as they arrive home and discover there is no where for them to take shelter and sleep for the night

Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem was the third important pilgrimage to that town recorded in the Scripture – and they are all connected to Jesus

- The first was the journey of Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem, Naomi's home
 - It was from this trip that Ruth would marry Boaz
 - They would have a son named Obed who would have a son named Jesse
 - He was the father of 8 sons the youngest was a shepherd boy who would become king
 - Ruth and Boaz were the great-grandparents of King David (Ruth 1:1-2)
- The second important journey was when Samuel traveled to Bethlehem on God's order to anoint David as the next king of Israel (I Sam 16:4)
- And then Joseph takes Mary, in the last trimester of her pregnancy over a 90-mile route, so that the OT prophecies would be fulfilled, and Jesus would be born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-7)

Why was there no room for them in Bethlehem?

- Because of a decree made by the ruler of the Roman empire at that time, Caesar Augustus
 - He was the adopted son of his uncle Julius Caesar
 - Augustus was the name given to him as Caesar
 - His birth name was Octavian or Gaius Octavian
 - He was born in 63 BCE and came to full power in 31 BCE at the age of 32

- It was a time of civil war in Rome, but he managed to bring peace to the land
- It was also Augustus' uncle, Julius Caesar, who had put Herod in place to be the king of the Jewish people
 - Herod was a Jew but was loyal to Rome and they knew that they could control him to do as they wished with the Hebrews

Caesar Augustus had decreed that everyone had to return to their hometown for a census to be taken and taxes collected

- This means that Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem, their birth home
- A journey of about 90 miles from Jerusalem

I want to answer two questions regarding this trip to Bethlehem that ended in a manger

1. If this was their home, why did Joseph and Mary not stay with relatives?
 - a. It would have been too difficult if not impossible to explain what was happening
 - b. Mary was close to giving birth and they had not been married that long (6 months or so)
 - c. Joseph wanted to protect Mary from what would have been said of her
 - d. It is likely that he had been doing this all along the journey as they would likely have traveled in a caravan making the same pilgrimage
2. Why was Jesus born in a place where animals slept?
 - a. We know that the town was filled with people
 - b. The population of Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth would have been approximately 1000 or so
 - c. Not very large but that number would likely have increased several times over at the time of the census
 - i. Every room, every place to lodge would have been filled
 - ii. But consider one other thing that this represents
 1. Cows, goats, sheep, and this time of year – lambs
 2. Jesus is called the lamb of God by John the Baptist ([John 1:29,36](#))
 3. And then again in [Revelation 5:8, 7:17; 14:4](#) Jesus is called the Lamb who the 24 elders fell down and worshipped
 - d. It was also the sheep and lambs that were offered as a sin sacrifice through the OT and into the days of Jesus
 - i. The lamb would die to save the shepherd
 - ii. But a time would soon come, through Jesus, when the Good Shepherd would give His life to save the sheep

Jesus being born in a stable made Him unlike any other baby born in history

- The angels said to the shepherds in [Luke 2:12](#)
 - *This will be a sign to you; You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.*
 - Most newborns in that day were wrapped in cloths following their birth
 - Warmth and the security of the wrap calmed them and helped them to sleep
- But the manger was a different story

- This manger was in all likelihood located in a cave grotto
- A shallow opening in the rock face that would provide protection from the elements but little else
- It would have been cold at night, drafty, and dirty from the animals
- Hardly a fitting place for the Savior of the World to be born
 - At least from our perspective
 - But it was exactly what God had ordained to take place in order that we may come to recognize at least in some measure the depth of His love for His creation
- Jesus did not live the life of a king
 - It is one of the reasons why His disciples had such a difficult time understanding what He would teach about the Himself and the Kingdom of God, His Father
 - It did not go with what they observed and how they lived for those 3 years
 - We, however, have this explained to us by the Apostle Paul
 - *Phil 2:6-8 - Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!*
- The humble beginning in a manger would set the course of Jesus' life that would end also in a humble position – that of a death on a cross
 - Hung as a common criminal
 - Between two other common criminals
 - But Jesus was anything but common
 - He had left His incomparable glory in heaven to come and live among common man
 - He humbled Himself
 - From the very beginning to the very end Jesus demonstrated for us what it means to live a life surrendered to the Father
 - It culminated with His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane in the late hours of that Thursday night when He prayed...
 - *Not my will, but Your will be done. (Mark 14:36)*

As we examined last Sunday, the first announcement was made to lowly, simple, shepherds

- They were the very first missionaries
 - The first to tell others about Jesus
 - The first to obey what Jesus would later command His disciples to do
 - *Matt 28:19-20 – Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

This stable also represents one more thing – each of us

- That stable was not a pretty place
- It was certainly not a fit place for the Son of God to dwell even for a moment

- But then again, neither are we!
- Can God use a man or woman like you, or like me?
 - We are dirty, we are filled with sinful thoughts and actions, and we, like that manger, are not a fit place for the Son of God to dwell
- But He does!
 - In each of our hearts when we surrender our lives to Him

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed. The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head. The stars in the sky look down where He lay. The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.