

Why are you here tonight?

My guess is that we have everything that you were hoping for: Great music.

Beautiful flowers. Familiar stories. Familiar prayers. Candles lit. Silent night sung.

And, then, a return to our homes with the warm and fuzzy feelings that this evening is all about.

Right?

I hate to be a Scrooge. But, warm and fuzzy is far from what this night is all about.

From its beginning to its end, the story of Jesus is a story of rebellion.

It doesn't seem that way when we gaze upon peaceful scenes such as the one we have here and those in our homes. They are perfect. They are iconic. They really don't reveal the drama.

When all of this took place, the political climate of the region was a mess. The census was required in order that the Romans would know where everyone was and who could be taxed. The Pax Romana would be upheld – even if that Pax required violence against those who stood against it. Rule breakers were not welcome.

Mary and Joseph broke the rules. Mary is pregnant and Joseph, her legally betrothed companion, is not the father. If he'd been a law-abiding citizen, Mary would have been stoned to death and Joseph would have thrown the first one.

Joseph brought her to Bethlehem to be counted among his family in the census. Thank heaven for the census! Thank God for the legal excuse to get away from the scandal in Nazareth. However, no one would give them shelter in Bethlehem.

What? This was Joseph's hometown? Even family turned them away? Could it be that the rumor mill hit the little town of Bethlehem prior to their arrival?

Perhaps there was "no room at the inn" for two people of questionable reputation.

There was shelter, finally, in a cave with the animals. Mary gives birth surrounded by straw, dirt, and filth. Joseph's hands knew how to plane a board and build furniture. Being a midwife was probably not in his skill set. But, there they were, and lack of skills or knowledge on either one's part was going to stop the Son of God from entering this world. This dark, cruel, cold world.

We say Jesus is a King. Don't kings deserve more than this? Royalty parade their new offspring for all to see. Future rulers command the attention of the powerful and the powerful wannabes. We shower princes with gifts and attention. We look to future generations of powerful people to bring peace, prosperity, and hope. But should we?

There was no parade. No one of power knew of this birth. The angels appeared not to Herod, or Quirinius, or Caesar Augustus. Quite the opposite! The glory of the Lord shown round about a bunch of working class people, on the night shift, doing one of the least glamorous and lowest collar jobs anyone can imagine: herding sheep.

The heavenly host delivered to a bunch of what many might call stinking deplorables the good news of a Messiah who would lead them out of the oppression they suffered daily. This Messiah, they believed, would bring a peace that the Romans could not. They couldn't wait to go see him. Once they did – they came back rejoicing.

And if all of this weren't scandalous enough, Mary and Joseph had to flee from Herod or lose their lives, or at least the life of the child. Where did they go? Egypt!!! The scriptures were very clear that the Jewish people weren't ever to return to Egypt! Such rule-breakers these two are. But, what choice do you have when your life and the life of your wife and child are at stake? You run and become refugees in a strange land.

You might say – but the Wise Men! They traveled from afar to see the newborn king. They wore crowns. They were powerful, weren't they? They brought expensive gifts. That should count for something! Hm...well, yes, it does. It counts as just one more count of rebellion!

The pervading thought regarding the Messiah was that he would come to deliver the Jewish people from their bondage from Rome. The visitation of the Magi signaled that the Messiah was sent for all people.

Their gifts symbolized their recognition of Jesus' upcoming reign. Gold for his Kingship. Frankincense for his Priesthood. Myrrh foretelling a death at the hands of the oppressor. How dare the Gentiles recognize the Messiah-ship of Jesus! Why, it makes we chosen people a little....less chosen.

Wait a minute! I can hear you now: I didn't sign on for all of this. I thought that being a Christian was about being sweet and kind and following the rules. It was about doing the right things so we could go to heaven. I thought Christmas was about adoring a sweet little child and his parents as cattle are lowing. I don't want to break the rules. Please, please, give me back my sweet baby Jesus!!

Hmmmmmm

No.

It is

- Time to acknowledge the rebellion that the birth of Jesus brought to earth.
- Time to embrace this world up-ending event in which we see God entering into the straw and dirt and filth of our everyday lives.
- Time to realize that this Messiah is not about military might, or the power of authority, but about the power of love.
- Time to recognize that to find Jesus we must go to the rule-breakers, the working poor, and those who come from countries far from our own.
- Time to understand that our declaring Jesus is Lord scrambles all of the messages that come to us stating otherwise. The more accurate declaration should be “Jesus is Lord. You who believe you are in power are not.”
- Time to comprehend that we find Jesus not by seeking wealth or possessions or positions of authority, but by seeking him among the people we would usually ignore or choose not to see.

Jesus comes to us in the darkness, whenever we feel marginalized, whenever we are wandering in the desert of uncertainty and fear. His appearance into humanity proves that God wishes us to be hopeful. Christmas begins our journey with God, born anew each year. May it bring you joy and gladness along with the conviction to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself.

+In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.