

“What Can I Give Him?”

Luke 2: 1 – 20

Makemie Presbyterian Church

Christmas Eve 2008

Luke 2: 1 - 20 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration & was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house & family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged & who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son & wrapped him in swaddling cloth & laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them & the glory of the Lord shone around them & they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

<sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth, lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God & saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven & on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

<sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them & gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem & see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste & found Mary & Joseph, & the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words & pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying & praising God for all they had heard & seen, as it had been told them.

This ends the reading.

Because it's Christmas Eve & I am way excited, I have a joke for you.

Q: What do you call someone who is afraid of Santa?

A: Claustrophobic!

Luke 2: 1 – 20 is replete with sights, sounds, smells, scenery & sensations – a governor's decree, a long journey, pregnant Mary bumping along on a dusty donkey, no room in the inn, stunned shepherds, a heavenly host proclaiming Good News & peace, a crescendo of divine light & Word piercing the darkness, the Messiah has arrived.

So what would you give to this baby? born on Christmas Day. Would you give him: diapers, onsies, pacifiers? Probably none of us would give; gold, frankincense or even myrrh. And as the baby grows & becomes an adult what would you give him? A side-by-side shotgun, Timberlake boots, HP Laptop with a bunch of memory.

To go a little deeper, what would you give the King of King, the Lord of Lords, the Lamb of God, Wonderful Counselor, Adonai, Jesus Cristos, the Anointed of God, the Messiah. If you were invited over to a Christmas party at Jesus' house what would you bring for his birthday/Christmas present. What would you give him?

Would you give him a miserable defeated life, or a wretched on the shores of excess life, or an examined and then polluted life?

Uncle Jeff wakes up every morning under the overpass at the Hillsborough/Central Avenue exit in Tampa Florida. He is blurry from all the “liquid bread” he imbibed the night before. In & out of prison for vagrancy, nothing serious, he is as lost anyone in any of the stories of lost items in Luke, coins, lambs, sons. I wonder how will he celebrate Christmas? What will he give him?

Chuckie, my first ever real boyfriend, over 30 years ago, who we now call jokingly, “Jesse of Fernandina” for all his good works to the community on this island near Jacksonville Fl. If you are in trouble, it’s his house where you wind up. If you need food, money, work, an ear to bend, it’s him. He has in the years since we broke up: married, adopted a Chinese baby Hannah, started an orphanage in China with the Presbyterian church, started an ongoing ministry at the juvvy hall in Jacksonville, begun a publishing company “Encouraging Word,” is an elder at First Fernandina, and is contemplating having his mother move in with his family. I wonder what Jesse Chuckie will give him?

Now I’m going to admit something to you all, I have an ongoing email relationship with the Chaplain at the Dover Airforce base, Lt. Col John

Groff who wrote this to me Sunday Dec 21. ... I shall be officially retired from the Air Force on January 12, 2009 after serving for over 21 years. I retire as a chaplain, a Lieutenant Colonel, and according to the Air Force Medical Evaluation Board – a disabled vet. The simple medical issues are my knees & my right shoulder (and its two surgeries in the last 18 months). The tougher one is that I developed Atrial Fibrillation & will take a heart medicine the rest of my life to control it. The hardest one is being diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder caused by my time in working Dover's mortuary. I realized that I was exhibiting almost all the signs & symptoms & after receiving encouragement from caring friends – I “turned myself in.” It was difficult to face the fact that the care giver needed care & lots of it. What present will Chaplain Groff give him?

In the beautiful hymn “In the Bleak Midwinter” the song asks the question “what will I give him? If I were a shepherd I give him a lamb, what can I give him, poor as I am? And then the hymns ends with “give him my heart.”

Heart not the actual physical organ dripping red & lub-dubbing, but heart as the whole being, mind & soul. Just all of us in our entirety.

It's Christmas Eve! And if you are here it's because there is an inkling of what you want to give him. Your life. Those big rough hands of Jesus coming towards you as you offer your hand. And then, like a friend who means more to you, been there for you, knows you through & through & still thinks you are pretty terrific, brings you in close, to clasp you next to his heart.

We know from scripture, Jesus doesn't seem to pay attention to those who are doing pretty well. I think because if we are doing well or even okay or even borderline getting by, we are to be helpers to be like him, meeting a person at their point of need.

We know about the economy, it is suckish. And as a church we have made a commitment to our community to aid individuals as we are able. And I agree this is important work. But what I think is more important, and this comes from a well-fed, well-housed, well-cared for

view point is our relationship with Jesus. Even though its Christmas Eve may I get even deeper with you. Simone Weil explains that there are different categories of need: (1) physical needs of the body; (2) spiritual needs of the soul; and (3) physical needs of the soul. It is this third category that is most often neglected. We tend to think of the “Good news” as primarily spiritual in context. Yet the Good News in the text that Lee read just a little bit ago is that God will meet the physical need of souls. Just a little further on in Luke, in chapter 4, Jesus says that the words of Isaiah have been fulfilled. The words that tell us, the gates of jails will be unlocked & prisoners will be freed. Devastated cities will be rebuilt & dislocated persons will reclaim their homes & heritages. Victims of robbery & wrongdoing will be compensated, vindicated & restored. And in & through all this concrete, physical healing will be accomplished the healing of souls.

If so why then is there still so much brokenness, both physical & spiritual? Isaiah words challenge us to consider how this Christmas, I will attend to my & other’s physical needs in ways that fully participate in the Good News. What will I give him? What will you give him?

Millennia ago when I was single, I answered some ads in the personal section of a weekly newspaper. One of the men I spoke with, only spoke with on the phone, I didn't even know his real name and had never ever even laid eyes on him, said, "How about if I move in with you? I like to really get to know a person at the beginning of a relationship."

To which I replied, "Well, I actually like to meet the person before I discuss anything of such great importance."

To wit, you & I, we have to be ready to make room for someone. Probably none of us would invite a stranger to live with us. To make room for a totally stranger, I don't think so. So to give Jesus the gift I think he wants, we need to have a least an inkling of him, thus church, thus the Bible, thus prayer.

Now, the greatest paradox of our Christian faith is this: 2000 years ago Holy God, Emmanuel, took on human flesh in the form of a baby to pierce the darkness & turn our world upside down. And I think, what we can give him, is to make room for him, to make room for him in the inn of our hearts, so that Jesus can pierce the darkness in our world, again & again.

Merry Christmas