

Christmas Eve Sermon 2025

Mary gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger
– there was no place for them to stay in the inn. Luke 2:7

In the movie *The Christmas Box*, a woman asked her handyman a question, “What is the first gift of Christmas?” Now, you need to know that these two persons didn’t hit it off at all. In short, they didn’t like each other. And when she asked a question, she was usually trying to teach him something. “What is the first gift of Christmas?” His first response, a “smart answer,” was, “A tie.” The woman looked sternly at him, and insisted he be serious, so he tried again, more earnestly: He said, “The first gift of Christmas is love.” She told him that that was a good beginning, but only a very small part of the answer and that he should take time and think it through. A lot of time passed. He had many experiences and dreams. Finally, thanks to his own child and some close brushes with angels, he got it: “The first gift of Christmas is a child.”

I can almost hear the hum across the church and across this community. I can hear it across the nation. “So what’s new? We always knew that the first gift of Christmas is a child. Isn’t that why we buy toys? Isn’t that why we put up Christmas trees? Isn’t that why we build manger scenes and put the baby at the centre? Don’t we always say that Christmas is for children? Isn’t that why we spend what we do not have to make them happy?”

But the question is not, “Why do we celebrate Christmas?” or, “To whom does Christmas belong?” The question remains, “What is the first gift of Christmas?”

Sometimes we give theological responses to that question. “We have been given One who will be known as ‘Wonderful Counsellor,’ ‘Mighty God,’ ‘Eternal Father,’ ‘Prince of Peace.’” And we even quote from Isaiah, “His royal power will continue to grow; his kingdom will always be at peace. He will rule as King David’s successor, basing his power on right and justice.” And all that is true, but when all the theologizing is done, when all the philosophizing and romanticizing is done, we must admit that the first gift of Christmas is a child — a real, human child.

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But gifts are given with the hope that they will be well received and accepted.

Gifts are given with the hope that they will be found useful. Gifts are to be enjoyed. Gifts are often personal, even though sometimes they are given to a group, a community or a nation. The child Jesus was given to all of creation as the first gift of Christmas. However, even the bearer of the gift, his mother, was not ready for him.

Mary and Joseph did not have a place for the birthing of the child, neither did they have clothes for him. And for whatever reason, the Hotel manager or the Inn keeper could not or did not find them a room. Here would be a good place to do some rationalizing. Did the Inn keeper realize that this woman was close to delivering a child? Was that an appropriate place for newborn children? Was the Inn crowded since so many out-of-town folks were in Bethlehem? Or was it that there was just no place FOR THEM to stay in the Inn? Wherever you come out on this, the fact remains that there was a lot of unreadiness for Jesus.

Recently, I was helping a woman secure rented space for her and her three-year-old son, and to my dismay, I realized how difficult it is to rent an apartment to families with children, and how almost impossible it is for a single woman with a child to rent. Like the woman, I began to experience the roller coaster of emotions. One moment my heart shouted, "Yes!" when the manager of the apartment complex told me that they had a one-bedroom apartment available.

That "Yes!" took me to the top of the ride of hope, but soon my heart and stomach were gasping for air as I felt the downward fling: the manager said, "Sorry, did you say she has a child?" What moments of desperation we felt! What desperation Mary and Joseph must have felt! No room.

Our culture claims to love children. Look at the ads. Most of them are geared to children. All cereals are made for children. What about those jeans? Our children are a source of revenue. When they are no longer economically viable and satisfying, they are dropped. We might say that this is what the commercial world does, but unfortunately, many of our homes and households are not inclusive of children. Let's go home for a moment. We bathe our children, dress them and make them look pretty. But we do the same for our house plants and our pets. Do we honestly accept children as members of the family with privileges and responsibilities? Children, how do you feel? Do you feel like a real person? Do adults spend time with you and listen to you? Can you do some of the things that you want to do with adults? Do the adults in your life listen to

you or are they on devices mumbling to you? Lean over and whisper your answer into the ear of the adult nearest you!

The Christmas story, however, does not end on a note of hopelessness.

Rather, it is dripping with hope. The angel's first words to the shepherds were, "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people." A child IS the good news. And the story goes on to tell how the shepherds went to Bethlehem to "see this thing that has happened, which the Lord" told them. Then the shepherds returned to their homes "singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen."

Christmas offers us and the whole world another opportunity to go visit and welcome the child. Welcome our gift. Christmas says that children are good news. Christmas says that children must take a central place in the nation's heart. Christmas says that children will come, even if no room is made for them. Christmas says, "Accept, respect and receive children as God's own people, made in God's own image, and sent as a sign of hope." It is a hope that guarantees the continuity of humanity, the ongoing care of creation and the balance between memory and prophecy, anticipation and reflection. This is a hope that guarantees our very salvation.

In the Christ child, God becomes vulnerable. God's care is left up to human persons! Likewise, as the baby Jesus is seen again and again in each child, we cannot help but shudder with awe, realizing the great responsibility and trust which God has placed into our hands — our very own individual hands, our families' hands, our communities' hands, and our nation's hands. Let us therefore do all we can to honour children as God's own people, making a place for them in the culture and in our households, lifting them up, singing praises to God for all we have heard and seen. Amen,