

Christmas Eve.

Text: Mat 1.21, Acts 16.3

Suggested Hymns:

- 1) Two Bethlehems
- 2) No room for Jesus
- 3) Become as little children

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our Christmas eve address is today is Matthew 1:21, ²¹ ***“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”*** And Acts 16:31, ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”***

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Tonight we are telling of our faith in Jesus Christ as our one and only Saviour from sin. We read in Acts 16:31, ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”*** On the front cover we can see that the Old Testament word “Messiah” is equivalent to the New Testament word “Christ” which means “the anointed one.” Anointed means set apart to serve God.

This is exactly what the angel told Joseph, ***you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.*** To be saved you need to have faith and believe that Jesus is your own personal Saviour. You need to realise that you are a sinner and that you need a Saviour. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Two Bethlehems

We are all familiar with the Bible readings about the birth of Jesus and we will be reminded of them again tonight. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The name Bethlehem calls to our mind two stories.

One is the Christmas-story which we hear tonight and on Christmas Day. With our mind’s eye we see Joseph and Mary setting out from Nazareth in Galilee on their journey to the city of David. The distance was 100 km. The roads were difficult to travel. At best it took four days of hard travelling until they reached the little town.

We think of the wonderful secret which the two travellers shared, the knowledge which they had of the event in which would crown the glory of the house of David. We can well imagine that every feature of the country through which they passed was invested with a new interest.

There were the heights of Jezreel which reminds us of the prophecy, *‘ For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’*¹

There were the fields where gentle Ruth had gleaned. There Jesse with his eight sons had lived, and in those fields and groves the youngest of the eight, David, had learned to sling his stones and sing his psalms.

And now, from the hilltops, are the lights of the little town which reminds us of Micah’s word, *‘ But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.’*² Mary and Joseph knew that fulfilment was at hand.

So they entered the little town. Where should they go? It is high time that Mary should rest. They went to the inn but the inn was full. There is no room. But their necessity is urgent, and so their refuge for the night is a stable for horses and camels, and a pen for cattle. There was born the Saviour of all mankind, and the manger of the cattle became the cradle for the King of kings.

That birth in Bethlehem was the most important birth that ever took place on our planet. If the world appreciated the event, it would have been cried out from shore to shore; but there was so little wisdom in the world, that there was no room for Jesus in the wide, wide world, and the precious little Child had to steal into the world, so to speak, in a stable among the cattle, because there was no room for Him in the inn.

The other story that Bethlehem calls to mind is a very gruesome one. When Jesus was now a little child, Herod the king, hears from the Wise Men that a new king has been born. Always fearing for his rule, he grows troubled, and at once a truly satanic plan ripens in his heart. He pretends to be devout and asks the Wise Men to return to him and to tell him where to find the Child.

Still suspicious, he also prepares for the possibility that they might not return and bring him the desired information, so he asks them the probable age of the Child. He has an evil plan all fixed in his mind, which later on he carried out, to kill all children of that age in the whole neighbourhood to make sure that the new king is put out of the way. It is difficult to imagine a more evil person than Herod was.

Yet, as far as the final result is concerned, Bethlehem is under the same judgment. Herod set out to kill the Child; his sin was positive. As far as Bethlehem was concerned, the same Child might have died of neglect and exposure in the cold night. Bethlehem's sin was negative.

The lesson is this. Jesus has two kinds of enemies. Those who actively oppose Him and would kill Him today, if they could, to get Him out of their way; and those who simply neglect Him. But in the end, as far as their soul's salvation is concerned, it amounts to the same thing.

The question is not, *How much have you done against Jesus to obstruct His way?* But the great question is, *Did you receive Him when He came to you?*

Now, there are a few Herods in the world; but this whole wide world has become one vast Bethlehem — no room for Jesus! How sad that picture in Bethlehem of Judea! The Child had only two friends, His mother and His foster-father.

No bed, no nurses running around; only straw and the cattle. But Bethlehem did not know the Child; its innkeepers did not realise whom they were turning away when Joseph and Mary applied for admission. Although even then it must be said that common kindness should have moved them to make room for Mary because she was soon to have her baby.

The word that this Child spoke later on applies, *'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'*³ And the next day they were told who the Child was, and we do not hear that it made any great difference. We do not hear that the mayor of the town came down to offer the Child the keys of the city and the best bed in the town. It is evident that the people of Bethlehem paid very little attention to the story of the shepherds.

2. No Room For Jesus

How much sadder, then, that today, when all the world knows of Jesus, it still must be said, *No room for Jesus!* How sad that so many in wilful and culpable rejection exclude Jesus from their hearts and homes!

No room for Jesus in the government of the world! Look into the text books, listen to the teachers of any science, of any branch of knowledge, and see if you can find a nook or corner for Jesus and His governing and preserving power. Rather they have constructed such a perfect theory of world government where there is no room for God, no room for Jesus.

No room for Jesus in the intellectual life of most people! They are self-sufficient. They believe that by applying their knowledge, their reasoning power, their intuition, to nature and to mankind they can reach all the conclusions they need. They think they can find the when and the where of the universe, the origin, the purpose, and the ultimate destiny of man.

No room for a divine teacher! Man thinks he has nothing to learn; so he bars the doors and sends the light of the world elsewhere. His little inn of knowledge and aspirations is occupied from floor to roof.

No room for Jesus in man's spiritual needs! This is far more serious. They have no room for a Saviour because they have no sense of sin. Like that young man in the gospel they want to know which of the commandments they have broken. They do not realise that there is not a single one which they have kept.

It does not occur to them that they owe God ten thousand talents of reverence and obedience and that all they have been offering Him in payment is a few cents of more or less respectability.

They are not conscious of that deep and wide gulf between their indebtedness and their payment. And they go on their way and will not know that they have sinned against the Lord and need His abounding grace and mercy. And so, naturally, they have no room for Christ, the Saviour, the great Reconciler between God and man.

No room for Jesus! Sad to say, a great many professing Christians are like the innkeepers of Bethlehem. They recognise the claims and the powers of the Christ-child and yet refuse to welcome Him into their hearts. Their lives are so crowded with cares, with the business of the making a living and family matters,

or they are so filled up with the pleasures and the prizes of this world, or they are so occupied with pursuits that are unscriptural.

This means that there is no room for Jesus Christ who comes to speak of sin and of mercy and of the life which is spiritual and eternal. No room for Jesus who wants to be trusted and loved and served as the Saviour of the human soul and the Ruler everything. So, while admitting His right to enter, they still do not open the door to Him. And they are the guiltiest class.

Yes, there are a few Herods, but how many people are like Bethlehem? — They have no room for Jesus! As far as they are concerned, Jesus might never have been born. *“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”* the apostle says.⁴ If you are in a flaming house, you do not need to jump into the fire to be killed; just sit still and neglect to ring for the fire brigade.

A missionary handed out cards to his hearers, on one side was the question, *“What must I do to be saved?”* and then God’s answer, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”* On the other side was the question, *“What must I do to be lost?”* and under it the one word, *“Nothing.”* That is all — nothing.

3. Become As Little Children

Throughout the world in practically every Lutheran church it is customary to hold children’s services on Christmas Eve. In song and Scripture our children present the Christmas story to us. Those of us who have become older and wiser should humbly sit down and learn a lesson from the children.

And a very needful lesson it is. It is an example of Christ’s great wisdom that He so frequently points us to the children as models. *“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted,”* i.e., turned around, entirely changed, *“and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”*⁵

Children are used to taking. When we grow up, we know we must work for everything we get, and we carry that over into the realm of religion and drift into the old heathenism, which teaches that we must do this or that, or sacrifice our dearest and best, to earn God’s favour.

Therefore we close our ears to that divine answer, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”* The children are our examples. They

simply take what is given to them. They believe what God tells them, and they are saved.

On the other hand, we are apt to get the idea that a person must do certain things to be lost, and if he does not do these things, then he is pretty safe. But you need not be a Herod to be lost!

And again let us take the children for a model. They have not done anything toward their salvation; but they do not neglect to take this salvation when it is offered to them. They take into their hearts the Word of God and say with the shepherds, ***“Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.”***⁶ For them it is a fact, a positive fact, that this thing has happened in Bethlehem and that thereby He has brought salvation.

During this coming year do not only tell your children to study their Sunday-school lessons, but study it with them, and you cannot help being convinced that this Child of Bethlehem, is God Himself manifest in the flesh. And as such He is the sinners’ hope. He is your Saviour.

So let us open wide the doors of our hearts to give Him room. Lift that Christ from the manger and lay Him down in your heart. You may not have as costly a present as the Wise Men brought; but bring to the manger the gold of your faith, the frankincense of your adoration, the myrrh of your repentance and love.

Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass. May the Lord open our eyes to see! ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Isaiah 9:4-6

² Micah 5:2

³ Matthew 25:45

⁴ Hebrews 2:3

⁵ Matthew 18:3

⁶ Luke 2:15