

December 4, 2011
Christmas Sights and Sounds
Luke 2:1-3

Luke 2:1-3 “And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³ So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.”

Isaiah 2:1-5

“The word that Isaiah the son of Amos saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ² Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *That* the mountain of the LORD’s house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. ³ Many people shall come and say, “ Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,”

It is that time of the year again, & all around us are the sights & sounds of Christmas. The Christmas Parade last Wednesday evening, the holiday decorations, the crowded stores & shopping centers, & even the traffic congestion, all remind us that Christmas is near.

Bells are ringing, choirs singing, & Christmas music has been filling the air, since Halloween. In fact, if you listen carefully, you might even hear some Christmas classics but then you might even hear a new song, like “Mary did you know.”

Of course, it’s not just music that we hear. Our airwaves are filled with the clamor of commercials for products we simply must buy for Christmas. In fact, we hear so many of these sounds that soon they just become noise to us.

That is my concern this morning - that we may become so overwhelmed by the noises of Christmas, that we’ll never hear the sounds of that first Christmas night we really ought to hear - the sounds of a **noisy inn, & of a mother’s lullaby.**

I would like you to think about these two sounds this morning, & of what they remind us.

WE ARE REMINDED THAT GOD DOES LOVE US with the noisy inn and mother’s lullaby

First of all, these two sounds remind us that God does love us, even though many people have turned their backs upon Him.

There wasn’t much love, I suppose, in the inn. It was full of people who had traveled long distances to get there because Rome had decreed that all the people in the empire were to be

taxed. And to make sure that no one was missed, the head of every family had to go back to his ancestral hometown to be enrolled in a census, & then to pay the taxes levied against him..

There was probably hostility, as they were being taxed. Forced to support a political system they didn't approve of, and seemingly could not little about. Sort of sounds like today, doesn't it. The very fact that they were there in Bethlehem emphasized that they were a conquered people, not free to go where they wanted to go, or do what they wanted to do. So their anger is a part of the noise of the inn.

In the midst of all this the door opens. And just for a moment all the noise stops as the people turn to look. There in the midst of all the noise stands a man & a woman. They obviously have traveled a long ways, & the woman is great with child. But there is no room for them there, no room for them anywhere.

I wonder what the people thought? I wonder how many of them had ever found themselves in difficulty, needing help, but with no place to go? If you have ever been in need, you are more sensitive to the needs of others. Apparently, for whatever reason, there was no one there sensitive enough or caring enough to step forward & say, "Well, I'll help you. Or, Take my room you need it more than I do."

No, nobody stepped forward to do that. For a moment, they had stopped & looked & maybe even thought about it, but then they returned to what they were doing, & the noise level rose once again.

When we look into Bethlehem & hear its noise, we see what is wrong with the world. We see anger, rebellion, indifference, & poverty. We might feel as if we are looking into nearly any city in the world.

But when we hear a voice singing a lullaby and we hear a message of love. Maybe we see there are people who are concerned about others. There are marriages that survive 10 years, 20 years, even 50 or 60 years. There are young people who have high ideals & high goals, & who want to make something of their lives. There are young men and women who are keeping themselves pure before God and saving themselves to the one they are to become one with. There are happy homes, & people who love & are concerned about each other.

Every year Christmas comes to drown out the noise of the inn & to remind us of God's love. That is worth hearing, & that is what God wants us to hear, the sound of His love all over again.

A little boy went with his mother into a crowded department store where people were elbowing each other, & weary clerks were ringing up their sales. It was a mad house a scene of noise &

frustration.

In the midst of it all stood the little boy holding on to a balloon filled with helium. But in the press of the crowd the boy was bumped & he lost his hold on the string. His balloon floated away to the ceiling.

One of the clerks saw it happen. So she called up the janitor & asked, "Would you please bring a ladder up here to retrieve a balloon?" The janitor said, "What?" She said, "I want you to rescue a balloon."

He protested, but then gave in. Soon here he came, bringing a ladder out into the middle of the crowded floor. For a moment everything seemed to stop. Cash registers stopped ringing. People stopped elbowing each other, & everybody watched as the janitor climbed up the long stepladder, grabbed the string of the balloon, brought it down & handed it to the little bright-eyed boy. And everybody applauded.

And Then ---- they went back to elbowing each other again. Cash registers started ringing again, & everything went back to the way it was before. But for a brief moment there was once again evidence of love & care & concern in our world. Then it was back to normal.

Christmas comes every year to remind us of God's love, and with all the noise in our world, we desperately need to be reminded.

THEN TOO WE ARE REMINDED THAT JOY IS AVAILABLE TO US

The sounds of Christmas also remind us that joy can be ours through knowing Jesus Christ, the Lord.

The people in Bethlehem may have felt as if they had little to be joyful about. After all, they were a conquered people, oppressed & probably mostly poor. They had many reasons to be unhappy.

Some of them were trying to dull their senses through alcohol, as if to forget their troubles for a while, much like what happens today. **People everywhere try to find some joy everywhere but the one true source of Joy, which is Jesus.**

Do you remember the children's story by Dr. Seuss of "The Grinch That Stole Christmas?" It's about an evil Grinch who goes to Whoville to steal all the trappings of Christmas because he doesn't want people to have a happy Christmas.

So on Christmas eve, while everyone ... is asleep, he goes & steals all their presents. He even steals all the Christmas trees & their tinsel & lights & turkey dinners. He takes everything about Christmas from their homes & hides them in a cave high on the hill.

But to his amazement & frustration, on Christmas morning the people of Whoville, young & old alike, join hands & begin to sing & rejoice in celebration of Christmas. The message of the story is that their joy at Christmastime doesn't depend upon presents or trees or tinsel or lights.

Now, Dr. Seuss doesn't tell you where Christmas joy comes from, but I will. **It comes from a God who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to come & live among us, & die for us.**

WE ARE REMINDED THAT REAL PEACE COMES THROUGH THE PRINCE OF PEACE

The sounds of Christmas tell us is that the opportunity for real peace in our lives comes through a personal relationship with Jesus, the "Prince of Peace."

There was not much peace in the hearts of the people in Bethlehem. They were a conquered people, serving the hated Romans, & there was nothing that they could do about it. So that night might have been filled with arguing, even fights, it may have been filled with despair & selfishness & indifference. Into this environment the King of kings and Lord of lords was born. I find that totally amazing!

Maybe you're here today because you need something "amazing in your life." You might be filling a little like those folks in Bethlehem. You might be feeling as if you have nothing to be joyful about If that is the case, you are a prime place for the amazing to happen. But you have to keep your eyes and ears open ... or like those people in Bethlehem, you might not recognize it.

Let me suggest a few rather personal questions. Ask yourself.

What is happening in my life? How am I reacting to a world that seems to be so hard, so cold, & so indifferent? Is it with anger, or fear, or helplessness?

Jesus was born the Prince of Peace – so He's able to give you and I **"a peace that passes understanding?"** The kind of peace that the world can't give. A peace that calms our nerves. A peace that gives us confidence in the midst of adversity. A peace that tells us that God is still on His throne & in control of our world.

There is a story about a man who lost his young wife, leaving him to be both mother & father to

a six-year-old son. After her funeral father & son came home, both feeling so alone & grieved by their loss. That night as they prepared for bed, the boy asked, "Daddy, may I sleep in your room tonight?" Dad agreed, but neither one could seem to go to sleep. They both tossed & turned until late in the night. Finally, the little boy asked, "Daddy, are you looking at me? Because if you're looking at me, I think I can go to sleep." And the father answered, "Yes son, I'm looking at you."

With the eyes of his father upon him the little boy finally fell asleep. After he was asleep the father got out of bed, walked over to the window & pulled back the curtain. He looked up into the starry sky & said, "Daddy, are you looking at me? Because if you are, I think I can rest & be at peace."

Christmas comes to remind us that God loves us, & that joy & the "peace that passes all understanding" can be ours.

If you have a decision to make for Jesus we pray that you will make it. If you have never experienced His love or His joy or His peace we pray that today might be that day for you.

Have you invited Jesus to be your Lord, Savior, Prince of peace.

If you have a decision on your heart that needs to be made, will you make it now

All are welcome to receive Holy Communion