

Where Do I Belong?

Luke 2:1-20

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,

7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

*14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds

*said to one another,
"Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

John 1:10-16

10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.



14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

15 (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'")

16 Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.

As we approach December 25th, it gives us another opportunity to pause and consider again the events of Christmas and Jesus whose birth we celebrate.

Christmas is a special time of year. More and more people in Japan are putting up lights and decorations. In your neighborhood at night you are

sure to see illuminations of Christmas trees, stars, Santas, and Reindeer. Unfortunately, up till now, I have not seen a Nativity scene or any decoration that depicts Jesus or the Christmas story from the Bible.

One of the things that have become a tradition in many churches is to do a Christmas play. People dress up as the original characters of the Christmas story and re-in act the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. It is a wonderful way to celebrate and remember what really happened on Christmas and to focus on Jesus.

I would like to share with you a modern day parable. It is about a particular Christmas play that is set in a small school in a small town. The events have much to do with Jesus and the true meaning of Christmas.

Christmas is a time when we can see clearly that God has not rejected His creation. He compassionately takes the initiative with love and grace to call people to himself.

The Annual Christmas Play:

Everyone knew Betty. She had been born seventeen years ago, crippled in body but not in spirit. No one had expected her to live, but she had. Her hunched back and twisted spine were easily seen from a distance.

The time was before Christmas. The small town was having their auditions for the annual Christmas play. It had become a tradition in the small town. Many children tried out each year for the limited parts. Young children hoped to be shepherd boys. Older children hoped to be shepherds or wise men. Those who sang hoped to be part of the angelic choir. A chosen few hoped to play the main parts such as the

innkeeper, the Angel of the Lord, Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:1-20).

Betty sat outside the choir room door. She agonized to herself. "What am I doing here?" "I'll never be chosen for a part." "I try not to care anymore, but I do." "I don't want to be hurt anymore." "The music teacher will never choose me for a part." "I just don't fit."

Several years ago Betty had tried out for the play. At that time there had been a different music teacher. That teacher had cast, directed and accompanied the play for more than thirty years. At that time, the teacher had taken one look at Betty's misshapen body and said,



"Child, you just don't belong. I don't remember seeing any part in the script where it calls for a crippled girl." Without singing a single note, Betty shuffled home, hurt and humiliated. She vowed never to try out again. But then that teacher retired (*Thankfully!*).

This year they had a new teacher. He was the opposite of the former teacher. He led with love and compassion. Betty liked him from the first time they met. He demanded a lot but he coached and corrected with kindness. This teacher himself sang with great power and passion.

He had asked Betty to try out for the play this year. Because he had asked, she felt obligated to try. But she still thought to herself while waiting to audition; "I ought to leave now and avoid the pain." "There is no place for a girl like me in the play." "I don't want to be rejected again." She finally decided to slip away quietly. But before she could get up to leave, her name was called.

When she finished singing, the music teacher kindly said, "thank you." The list of those chosen would be posted tomorrow. That night, Betty still couldn't sleep. Her mind went back and forth. She struggled between the reality of knowing she

didn't fit in and the great need to be accepted. In the morning she had a 'knot in the pit of her stomach.'

That morning, timidly and fearfully she looked at the list that had been posted on the choir room door. The people who had been chosen for the heavenly choir were

listed at the bottom of the page. As she expected, her name wasn't there. Rejected again! But as she turned to leave, she saw something out of the corner of her eye. Her name was listed at the top of the page! She had been chosen to sing the only solo part in the whole play. She was to be the Angel of the Lord. She was to sing to the baby Jesus, the Son of God!

There had to be a mistake, she thought. That part was so *visible*. She went to talk to the teacher. He said that he didn't want to upset her. He said he was going to make

some changes in the play this year concerning her part. He said she was going to be placed in a different place than former years. Betty's first thought was: "I will be hidden offstage."

But the music teacher said that her part and the message she was to sing were central to the play. Her place was to be above the other angels on the center of the stage. When Betty heard this, the years of hurt that she held within her heart

could not be contained. She burst out: "You don't want me in the middle of the stage." "Won't the way I look ruin the whole thing?" "You don't want me where everyone will stare at me!"

The music teacher responded kindly that he had no problem with her singing that part or where she would be. Betty heart was warmed by his acceptance. The rehearsals were exhausting, but great joy filled her heart as she practiced and sang.

In this small town, when there is a community event, everyone attends. The whole town attended the Christmas play. It was the Sunday before Christmas. That year, the whole town saw Betty sing her heart out to Jesus! It was said that never had the angel sang so sweetly.

Because everyone had gotten used to seeing her broken body, they never realized how sick Betty really was. It was a shock to the community when Betty died a short time later.

Her mother conveyed a last request from Betty to the music teacher. Would he please sing at her funeral?

On that day, as the music teacher rose to stand, **he rose from his wheelchair**, two of Betty's classmates supported him, one on each

side. He sang with all his heart to Jesus just as Betty had sung to Jesus during the Christmas play.

This story illustrates the compassion, understanding and acceptance surrounding a Christmas event in a small town. How much more so does the actual true Christmas events reveal the depth and strength of God's compassion, understanding and acceptance in Christ to the world.

Christmas is about the Compassion and Understanding of God:

The true Christmas story reveals the compassion and understanding of God. He shared in our humanity. God chose to reveal himself through becoming flesh and blood, a human body. "The word became flesh (John 1:14)." God chose to be touchable, approachable and reachable as Jesus. In His humanity he experienced the things we experience. Jesus suffered the things we suffer. Jesus got tired like we get tired. He knows our weaknesses. He knows our struggles.

Jesus sees you with a heart of compassion. One author has written that when Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them, the word used for compassion in the original language is used to describe the feeling you have in your 'gut'. It is not just casual pity.

"Jesus felt the limp of the crippled. He felt the hurt of the diseased. He felt the loneliness of the leper. He felt the embarrassment of the sinful." He felt it deeply and in his gut.

He knows and understands what we need most.

Christmas is about God's Acceptance through Faith in His Son:

Jesus is described in the Bible as a friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19). Those who had been rejected, hurt or suffering were not reluctant to approach Jesus for fear of being rejected. Jesus reached out to others. Those who put their faith in Christ will never hear the words; "There is no place for you." In His heart you are precious. It is not because of our goodness. It is not because we are wonderful people. It is because of what Christ has done for His children.

Christmas is about the love of God for a world that is suffering and in great need.

We were created in God's likeness to live in the world and to enjoy an intimate relationship with God. But right from the start, and down through the ages of history, we have turned away. We are the ones who

have rejected Christ (John 1:11). We have shut God out of our lives. We need to be restored in our relationship with God.



God knew our hopeless situation and responded in love. That is why Jesus came and was born. He would grow to be a man. He would live a perfect life. He gave His life on the cross to redeem us. As one author has written; "The heart of the gospel is that God loves us

think that you could never be loved with such compassion and understanding? Christmas is an invitation to be part of God's family. The historical events of the Christmas story reveal God's compassion and understanding. Jesus became like us so that we would come

Put your faith in Christ.

He is compassionate.

He is understanding.

Trust in what He has done as the Savior.

There is a place for you because of Christmas!



personally. God didn't start loving us when Jesus died for us. Jesus died for us because God already loved us. Jesus' perfect life has been accounted to those who believe. His death has paid the penalty of our sin that we owed." To those who receive Him, who believe in His name, God has given the right to be called sons and daughters of God

(John 1:12). Those who believe are sons and daughters that God loves as much as His own Son. The relationship is restored.

to Him. There are no auditions. There are no try-outs. You don't show up to perform your skill. Your part is not earned by your own 'goodness.' What is required is a humble and broken heart that recognizes your need of God's grace and mercy. That is where we belong. Our only hope of an eternally blessed relationship with God comes through repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ.

No one is turned away who comes to Christ in faith!

Our acceptance is in Him.

Come to Christ.

Lets pray,

Dear Lord,

Thank you for sending Jesus to be our savior.

Help us to realize how great your love and compassion is for the world.

Enable us to respond to all that you offer in Christ.

May this Christmas be a time when we see where we belong in God's story.

In Jesus name,

Amen

Where do you belong? Do you

