

What is Jesus Doing?

PREPARE HIM ROOM

Christmas

I want you to hear an important piece of Christmas scripture, but I don't feel qualified to speak it as there is one who has spoken it so much more eloquently than I ever could...

(you can see this video on Youtube)

Luke 2:8 *And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

Luke 2:9 *And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.*

Luke 2:10 *And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*

Luke 2:11 *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.*

Luke 2:12 *And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*

Luke 2:13 *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,*

Luke 2:14 *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

My first awareness of the Lord Jesus came to me when I was 4 years old. To me, whose parents were non-observant Jews who wanted to indulge their only child, Christmas was about presents and this magical jolly fellow in a Red Suit with a white beard and a tree filled with shiny things and lights that stood right next to the Menorah, which represented Hannukah.

What is Jesus Doing?

This, which to my child mind was far less interesting. But the Christmas Eve of the year that I turned 4, I suddenly became aware that Christmas was not just about me.

We lived in Manhattan, the very heart of New York City and that year, on Christmas eve, my mom and dad took me to see the displays in the Department Store windows, which were pretty fantastic. There were all kinds of mechanical wonders on display featuring Santa, elves, and every kind of whirligig and commercial bell and whistle that was available for purchase in the 1950s.

All of these displays, in stores like Macy's, Gimbels, F.A.O. Schwartz, and Bloomingdale's, were intended to draw bustling families into their stores to buy their wares for Christmas.

For this purpose, they all tried to outdo each other with their displays. But there was something else that day which was more impressive than the commercial extravaganza that was on display before my greedy eyes...

The thing I remembered the most was the crowds, and how FRIENDLY everyone was. It was not the usual "get out of my way" hustle and bustle on the streets of New York City. Suddenly people were smiling at each other and greeting each other with shouts of Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

We were passing by St. Patrick's Cathedral on the way to Macy's when I saw my first Nativity scene and suddenly, a thought came to me, seemingly out of nowhere, that a baby had been born a long, long time ago that had somehow changed the world.

That thought stayed with me every Christmas, long after I stopped believing in Santa Claus, and when I was 13, the year I was Bar Mitzvah'd, A Charlie Brown Christmas first went on the air. I will never forget the feeling I had when Linus spoke those words we just heard...

What is Jesus Doing?

Let me read them again...

Luke 2:9 *And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.*

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Luke 2:14 *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

So there were those two things... People greeting each other with Christmas joy and Linus reading scripture proclaiming Jesus as Messiah...

Those were the first two memories that the Holy Spirit brought to my mind when I finally give my life to Jesus thirty years later.

By the time I said yes to Jesus and asked Him to be Lord of my life, I realized that the Spirit of God had been preparing Him a room in my heart for a very long time. That lonely room was my desperate need for a Savior. It was only then that I began to read the word of God and understood that he had been speaking to me all my life.

When I read the Gospel of Luke for the first time with that Holy Spirit understanding I saw this scripture that preceded Linus's speech.

What is Jesus Doing?

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out, a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:1-7 KJV

There was no room for them in the Inn.

It is only because we know who this baby is that we romanticize this scene. After all, whenever we see the nativity scene, it's bathed in this beautiful light, and we see it in a place that is clean and neat and tidy.

But if we really look at this scene that Luke is painting it is far different from how we celebrate the birth of Jesus today.

Luke shows us Joseph the carpenter and Mary, an unwed mother to be, traveling 75 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the privilege of paying unjust taxes. The dirt road is dusty and the travel is hard for anyone, let alone a pregnant girl.

When they arrive, Luke leads us beyond the village of Bethlehem to a field where animals are grazing and down a dark, lonely path to some secluded spot, a cave probably, that shepherds used to keep their lambs safe, where we see the young couple and it is here that she gives birth.

What is Jesus Doing?

Imagine this young girl with bits of straw in her long, dark hair. She is wrapped in cloaks and a blanket, dusty from the long, hard road. It becomes clear to us how difficult this night has been for her.

She has traveled so far, and she is so young.

Even more distressing, we see beside her a small, crude, dirty feeding trough made of wood, or possibly stone, in which lays a sleeping newborn, wrapped tightly in unsanitary, blood-smeared cloths. Mary has just given birth to the King of Glory in a cave because there was no room for them at the Inn.

This scene, the real Christmas, has nothing of the feeling of the Christmas we know. It has all the feel of desperate homelessness — more like a scene we'd find under an overpass in East Oakland or a refugee camp in Southern Gaza than under our beautiful Christmas tree.

This was the reality. That Jesus came into the world and his own did not receive him.

There was no one to prepare him a room for his birth.

John the Beloved says this...

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

- John 1:10-11

So, who are Jesus' own?

When John wrote this scripture he was speaking of Jesus' mother's people and His Father God's Chosen people, the Jews.

What is Jesus Doing?

Those to whom John refers specifically were those Jews who hardened their hearts against who Jesus WAS because he did not fit their image of the Messiah. Their Messiah was supposed to be a conquering warrior hero that would release them from the yoke of Rome.

But then there were the disciples... Also Jewish men and women who followed Jesus throughout his ministry in the Galilee and into Jerusalem, and who were desperate for a Savior because they recognized that they were sinners in need of one.

Of them John says...

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name

- John 1:12

These were Jesus own... many of these followers of Jesus had been disciples of John the Baptist before they became disciples of Jesus.

John's baptism was for the repentance of sins. It was for the reason of announcing the coming Kingdom of Heaven that Matthew related this about John's ministry using that which God spoke through the prophet Isaiah 500 years earlier ...

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.' "

- Matthew 3:1-3

What is Jesus Doing?

John the Baptist's message was that the Kingdom of Heaven is here and available to all, but repentance is required to make room for the Messiah. Without true repentance the need for a savior really does not arise naturally in the human heart.

Free will, operating on its own, will choose to manipulate the person through the mind and the emotions. That is where sin resides. We are all human. We are all sinners. We all need a savior.

But do not be afraid, Jesus' tells us in John's Gospel...

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

- John 16:33

You've heard me say that the world is the world, and that it is only darkness, and that it will not change. It was the world, the darkness, that did not recognize Jesus.

Yet just like the Spirit of God hovered over the waters that were dark and void in the Beginning, when He spoke light and life into them, the Spirit of God hovers over the lives of people and draws those who belong to Him to Himself.

The Apostle Paul tells us:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

- Romans 8:14

This baby that was born in poverty, to two Jewish Palestinian refugees over 2000 years ago brought into this darkness, and out of this darkness, a great Light. But there was no room for them at the Inn...

So now, as then, the question is for each of us, "have we prepared Him room at the inn of our hearts?"

What is Jesus Doing?

There are many people who sit in churches because that's where they sat when they were children, and they say what they're supposed to say, and they know who Jesus is supposed to be, but they do not know who He is.

In my travels, I often ask people if they know the Lord. There are certain answers that always give me pause. Sometimes they say "I am very religious" or, "I've read the Bible" or "I go to church".

The Pharisees were very religious and knew the scriptures and they knew who the Messiah was supposed to be, but they didn't know who He was.

Sadly, many people I've met who know who Jesus is supposed to be don't really know Jesus because they haven't prepared room in their hearts for Him. If that is you or someone you love today, ask yourself, how do we prepare room in our hearts for Jesus?

We repent.

Now I apologize to those of you who were expecting a light and easy message on Christmas eve, but what we are talking about here is the Light of the world and we really ought to make ourselves ready for Him every day.

- Repentance opens the door that is tightly shut.
- Repentance clears out the room that is filled with junk.
- Repentance brings about times of refreshing.

So... we should acknowledge any unrighteousness in our own hearts, and repent.

Sadly, there are some who, once they identify as Christians, see no need for further repentance, not for the good reason that they know that they are forgiven of their sins, but because they have never acknowledged their sins as sin, and so have never repented.

What is Jesus Doing?

Acknowledging the evil of our own hearts when we think we're pretty good people is what it takes to be able to be desperate enough to know you need a Savior and it is also what it takes to be grateful enough that you have One.

Pastor Paul spoke last week from 1 Peter about the Joy that is ours when we go through trials and allow Jesus to reveal the impurities in our hearts that we need to get rid of...

Those of us who have recognized our need for a Savior and have asked Him into the room of our hearts may still need to make that room a more hospitable place for His Spirit to dwell.

How do we do that?

- First, we ask Him, as David did, to search us and reveal to us anything that does not bring Him Glory.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
And see if there is any wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting.*

- Psalm 139:23-24

- Then, we allow His marvelous Light to reveal those places in us that need our immediate attention and acknowledge the weaknesses His Light reveals...
- Then we repent, which means agreeing with God that He has the right to change us, and allowing and embracing that change as David did when he said...

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
For those who live in the deep darkness,*
- Psalm 51:10

What is Jesus Doing?

It is to all God's children that Isaiah spoke:

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light.
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
upon them a light has shined.*
- Isaiah 9:2

*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.*
- Isaiah 9:2,6

We celebrate tomorrow the birth of our Lord and King.

Let's decorate the room in which He lives in our hearts this Christmas with the same passionate attention with which we decorate our houses.

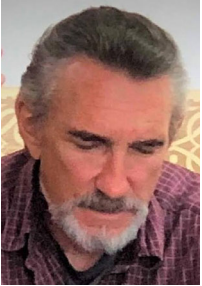
...and also let us help prepare Him room in someone else's heart today.

Let everyone you know and everyone you meet see how excited you are to be a beloved child of God because of His only begotten Son. Don't be afraid to greet believers and unbelievers alike with a joyful shout of "Merry Christmas", or even "Happy Holidays".

And don't be afraid to say "praise God" and "Thank you Jesus" all year round when they tell you about something good that has happened in their lives. After all, it is your joy and excitement about Jesus that will draw them to you and make them curious to know what all the fuss is about.

What is Jesus Doing?

Then you can tell them about that baby that was born over two thousand years ago that changed the world and brought you out of the darkness and into His marvelous light.



Let's Pray,

- John Henry Raskin, Roadhouse Rabbi