

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Nativity of Our Lord - Year C

Masked Service - 3pm and 7pm

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalm 96

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14[15-20]

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and

saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” [¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.]
The Gospel of Our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

A Child is Born...

Good afternoon/evening! The year after Megan, my wife, graduated from college she spent her time working at a homeless day shelter in Mobile, Alabama as part of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. Along with her seven roommates, she lived an intentionally simple life. It was great that she was able to serve and explore her own call during that time, but you may realize, Alabama is a good bit away. From where I lived in Martins Ferry, Ohio it would have taken me, without stops, roughly 15-16 hours of driving. I wisely decided to fly down for Thanksgiving, coming back on Monday, because I figured I was smart and that would save me from the craziness of holiday travel. Little did I know...

Getting down there was smooth sailing. Coming back was where it all fell apart. My flight from the small airport in Mobile, Alabama boarded and was on time. We taxied to the runway... and then we sat there... for something like an hour. Now this was an early morning flight from Mobile to Atlanta, and I had SOME time before my next flight... but not that much. The pilot eventually informed us that a brief storm and power outage in Atlanta had caused absolute chaos. I want to say we got there before 11am and noon, I sprinted to my next gate... but it was long gone. I got in the line and joined the growing ranks of people re-booking flights to try and get home.

Now, it's here that you need to understand a fundamental difference between me and my wife. Megan hates the airport. She wants to get there extremely early, find the gate, and never leave until they announce the first boarding group, at which time she gets up and stands around so that she can get on as soon as possible. I, on the other hand, absolutely love airports. I don't mind getting there early like Megan, but that's so I can walk around, looking in all the little shops. I don't buy anything, I just like being there.

So as I got my flight information and saw that I had some time to kill, I wasn't that worried. Atlanta is a big airport, so I figured I would be entertained. First I walked around for a while, checking all the terminals for what would be the best place to eat. After a lengthy scouting session I sat down for a long and relaxing meal. Next I went to a bar, had a beer or two and spent my time reading. After that I did some people-watching as I went from store to store. I had some cash to spend, so I decided to get a 30 minute massage. Then I did some more walking... and six hours had come and gone. Throughout it all my flight just kept getting pushed further and further back. It turns out 6 hours is my limit. But I ended up being stuck in

Atlanta International Airport for something like 12 hours. My flight got into Pittsburgh, PA at 2:30am, and I still had a 50 minute drive back to my house.

As far as modern day travel goes, I was exhausted. I probably walked 10-20 miles, spent the whole time with a bag on my back, trying to get rest on airport floors in less than quiet locations. I can't begin to think what it was like for Joseph and Mary, who was traveling pregnant at nine months! They tell you not even to fly at that stage, let alone make a rough trek across the Middle East. According to [googlemaps.com](https://www.google.com/maps) I could make the 90 mile journey, on modern roads, in 30 hours if I walked non stop. I doubt the Holy Family had such a luxury. Scripture leads us to believe that they are the poorest of the poor, so it was unlikely that Mary was even able to travel on an animal.

Most years I feel drawn to the majesty and solemnness of the Nativity story, but not so this year. It seems that since the pandemic started things have been especially hard for everyone. This past year at St. Paul's we have seen major life events for many of us. Some have been hit with tough health and sickness diagnoses, others have seen loved ones die, others have faced all sorts of emergencies, all the while the threat of the pandemic loomed overhead, with all the anxiety for things like jobs and health that come along with it. So, this year, instead of that quiet and peaceful thin place that we normally associate with the Nativity, I saw something different.

I saw an unsure husband, struggling to provide for his young wife amidst his limited financial and social means. I saw a young girl, between the ages of 13—15, possibly still reeling from the truth that she is bearing the child of God in her young womb. I saw a new couple struggling to meet the demands of an Empire that didn't care about them at all. I saw them

arrive exhausted at the journey's end only to find out that even the possibility of simple lodging was out of the question. Maybe in the midst of them wondering what to do, Mary's water breaks, forcing the innkeeper to offer them the barn out back.

It's in that barn, that manger, that we often paint a much prettier picture than what likely happened. Have you ever been to a petting zoo? I wouldn't even want to eat a quick snack around those animals, let alone give birth. I would also hazard a guess that local petting zoos are a fair bit cleaner than what Mary and Joseph found. I read a passage from Martin Luther's Christmas book on Wednesday, but it bears repeating. Luther writes: *"Think, women, there was no one there to bathe the baby. No warm water, not even cold. No fire, no light. The mother was herself midwife and the maid. The cold manger was the bed and the bathtub. Who showed the poor girl what to do? She had never had a baby before. I am amazed that the little one did not freeze... It must have gone straight to her heart that she was so abandoned. She was flesh and blood, and must have felt miserable... Her eyes were moist even though she was happy, and aware that the baby was God's Son and the Saviour of the world."*¹

We weren't there. Over the two thousand years since the birth, over the years of hearing the story over and over, we start to gloss over the very realness of the whole event. These are human beings like you and I, people struggling to figure out what God is calling them to do. In the midst of my own uncertainty and doubt, it gives me hope to know that these titans of our faith struggled with the exact same things we do, maybe even more! Again, Luther writes *"Let us, then, meditate upon the Nativity... I would*

¹ Luther, Martin, and Roland H. Bainton. *Martin Luther's Christmas Book*. Minneapolis Minn: Augsburg, 1997. p. 32.

not have you contemplate the deity of Christ, the majesty of Christ, but rather his flesh. Look upon the baby Jesus. Divinity may terrify man. That is why Christ took on our humanity... that he should not terrify us but rather that with love and favor we should console and confirm.”² In our grief, our pain, our uncertainty, the Nativity shows us that our God does not abandon us, that in there, in the middle of everything that life throws at us, God comes among us, brought into the world amidst the very real and very messy experience of all of us. There, during those nights, in the very darkest of times, we see a glimmer of hope, a shining star in the sky, letting us know that we are not lost, that God has heard our cry, that we are loved... that we are saved. Amen.

² Ibid. p. 33.