

"FACES AT THE MANGER (#5): THE MOST IMPORTANT FACE OF ALL"

(Luke 2:1-7)

© 2024 Rev. Dr. Brian E. Germano

[CHRISTMAS EVE MEDITATION]

**[PROPS NEEDED: 2 VIDEO-CLIPS FROM "*Charlie Brown Christmas*"]**

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 12-24-24]

1. Read Text (or read earlier in lighting of Christ candle): Luke 2:1-7 (CEB) and Pray.
2. **[SHOW VIDEO CLIP #1** from Charlie Brown Christmas (20:01 - 20:34, Total: 0:33), where Charlie Brown asks "*Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?*"  
  - A--You know, in the midst of all the hustle and bustle of today's holiday celebrations, isn't that exactly the question that many of us find ourselves asking? ...wondering what Christmas is all about?
  - B--To help answer it, since the beginning of December we've been sharing in a sermon series called "Faces at the Manger", exploring what the characters in the biblical Christmas story can teach us about life and about our relationship with God (all of these are available on our YouTube channel if you missed any of them).
3. Tonight, though, our focus turns to what I believe is the *most important* of all the "faces at the manger," and what it might tell us about the answer to Charlie Brown's question.  
  - A--Of course, being in church on Christmas Eve, you might expect me to say that the "most important face" at the manger is... the baby Jesus himself.  
    - 1--After all, Jesus *IS* the "*reason for the season,*" is he not? And in *his* face we see the face and nature of God Himself, right? <sup>1</sup>
    - 2--And it certainly wouldn't be Christmas *without* the face of Jesus at the manger.
4. But at the risk of sounding a bit crazy, I want to suggest that perhaps **the real "reason for the season" is NOT Jesus at all, ...but *YOU AND ME!***  
  - A--Think about it: the only reason Jesus came to earth in the first place was precisely *because* you and I (and the rest of the world) needed a Savior.  
    - 1--He wasn't born that first Christmas just so we'd have a great holiday for us to celebrate and take a vacation during!
    - 2--He wasn't born so that we could have an excuse to get together with friends & family, have parties & give gifts, or so that retailers could earn great profits.

B--No! *HE* was born so that you and I could experience our *OWN* "new birth" with God -- in other words, He was *born*, so that you & I could be *born again*!

5. So if that is true, then as important as the face of *Jesus* is to the Christmas story, perhaps it's not *HIS* face that God wants to see *MOST* at the manger, but **OURS... your face and mine!**

A--Perhaps you and I are the "*most important face*" at the manger, because *WE* are the very reason that Jesus came down to earth in the first place.

B--His mission, you see, wasn't *just* to save Mary and Joseph, or the Shepherds, or the townsfolk of Bethlehem, or the other people of *his* day, but also to show *you & I today* how very much God loves & wants a living relationship with each & every one of us.

1--The story of Jesus' birth, you see, is the story of a God who seeks a relationship with you and me.

2--It's a mission that we read about throughout the Bible, as in John 3:16, where we're told that "*God so loved the world [including you & me] that he GAVE his son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*"

C--So, to answer Charlie Brown's question... Christmas is not only about the birth of the Christ-child Jesus, but more importantly it's about *our response* to it!

1--Author James Moore put it this way: "*The real joy of Christmas is not in material presents,... [but] in [us] receiving the only gift of Christmas that really matters -- the gift of God's love in Jesus Christ; the Gift that was wrapped in heaven.*" <sup>2</sup>

2--Christmas, you see, is about *our* willingness to receive the greatest gift ever given.

6. But as we consider this, we have to remember that "*A gift is not a gift unless it's opened.*"

A--Just as we have to consciously *choose* to open a gift to really appreciate it, to truly understand and appreciate the miracle of Christmas, you and I have to consciously *choose* to place ourselves at the manger of Bethlehem.

B--We have to get out of the hustle and bustle of the world's noisy Christmas celebration long enough to kneel -- at least *spiritually* (if not literally) -- at the manger of Christ in our hearts and worship him.

7. So let me ask: Are you *there* tonight? ...I mean, I know you're *here* (in-person or online).

A--But tonight, on Christmas Eve, did you come for worship so that your heart and spirit could be *there* at the manger with Jesus? <sup>3</sup>

B--After all, it's possible to be *here* today and NOT be *there*... to simply be "going through the motions"! That was Charlie Brown's problem, wasn't it?

C--But let's remember how he finally found his way to the manger...

[SHOW VIDEO CLIP #2 from Charlie Brown Christmas (20:34 - 21:48, Total: 1:14): Start w/"*Yes I can tell you what Xmas is all about*"; End w/"*That's what Xmas is all about C.B.*"]

8. Christmas, you see, is about your face and mine "showing up" at the manger of Christ and worshiping Him there.

A--...Because the most important face that needs to appear at the manger... is *our own*!

B--Will you *choose* to go there with me tonight?

9. [PRAYER]

10. [HOLY COMMUNION (7pm only) and CANDLE LIGHTING with carols "Silent Night", plus "Joy to the World"]

#### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Colossians 1:19 says that "*In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.*" We even sing this fact in the Christmas carol "*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*" (The United Methodist Hymnal #240, Verse 2). And John 1:14 says that "*The word became flesh and lived among us,*" and that in him "*we have seen [God's] glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*" 2 Corinthians 4:6 also conveys this same sense.

<sup>2</sup> James Moore, Let Us Go Over To Bethlehem, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> For example, as we sang "*O Come All Ye Faithful*" and watched the Christ candle lit, and listened to beautiful Christmas music, in your heart and mind were you *there* at the manger experiencing the wonder? Are you there right now feeling the awe? the mystery? the life-changing power of the Christ-child of Bethlehem? *Are you there?*