

**It Wasn't Santa Claus Who Came to Town**  
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC  
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.  
December 27, 2020

Diaspora XLI – The Church Scattered, Forty-first Sunday

Text: Luke 2:1-14

Purpose: We need to realize that Jesus came to earth as promised. This gift was a demonstration of God's grace and glory.

A little boy, not accustomed to seeing a priest in his “work uniform” went up to the priest and asked, “Why do you dress so funny?” The priest replied, “This is the uniform that I wear when I work.”

The child, still staring at him, asked, “Do you have a boo boo?” The priest was somewhat puzzled, but quickly figured out that the child was looking at his white and black Roman collar. The priest pulled out the white plastic insert and showed it to the child telling him that it was also part of his uniform.



On the back side of the collar there was some writing: “Wash with warm soapy water.” The priest showed this to the little boy and then asked him “Do you know what these words say?”

The little boy, obviously much too young to read, stated, “I sure do.” The priest a little taken aback then replies, “OK then, tell me what it says.”

The little boy then replies, “Kills fleas and ticks for up to six months.”

Kids are great. I know this season of the year is one that children are anticipating with great interest. Maybe you have heard this popular song that is playing on the radio, in elevators, and department stores. It goes like this ...



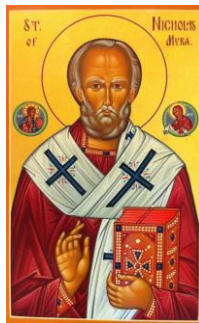
You better watch out, You better not cry  
Better not pout, I'm telling you why  
Santa Claus is coming to town.  
He's making a list, And checking it twice;  
Gonna' find out, Who's naughty and nice  
Santa Claus is coming to town.

He sees you when you're sleeping  
He knows when you're awake  
He knows if you've been bad or good  
So be good for goodness sake!

O! You better watch out! You better not cry  
Better not pout, I'm telling you why  
Santa Claus is coming to town  
Santa Claus is coming to town

Now I am not going to debate the theology of Santa Claus today. Our culture has so ingrained Santa Claus, that it is difficult to separate the Christmas message from cultural Christmas.

You may be surprised to learn that the person we call Santa Claus was a real person. I thought that it might be interesting to look into his origins and learn a little about this real man whose life has inspired the popular Christmas myths of the secular world.



The legend of jolly old St. Nick, or Santa Claus, began with a real person: St. Nicholas, a Christian who lived many centuries ago.

Very little is known about St. Nicholas with great certainty, except that during the early part of the 4th Century he was the bishop of the church of Myra, a city on the southern coast of Asia Minor.

Myra is the seaport mentioned in Acts 27:5 where a centurion placed Paul on board an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy that eventually wrecked near the Island of Malta. Myra was part of what is now modern-day Turkey.

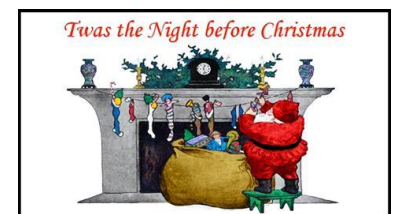
Tradition says that St. Nicholas was put in prison because of his faith during the persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor, Diocletian. He was later released when Constantine the Great became emperor and proclaimed Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire after accepting this faith for himself.

Because of St. Nicholas' reputation for generosity and compassion he came to exemplify the spirit of giving at Christmas time.

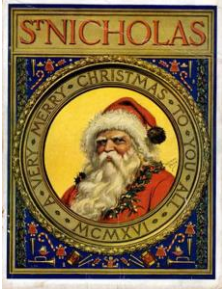
His transformation into Santa Claus began in Germany among Protestant churches where he was called *Kriss Kringle*, which was derived from "*Christkindle*", which means "*Christ child*". Dutch settlers in New Amsterdam introduced the legend to America. They knew him as "*Sint Nikolaas*" or "*Sinter Klaas*", which soon became "*Americanized*" as *Santa Claus*.



Our modern-day conception of Santa and the myth surrounding him with red suit, reindeer, sleigh and portly size originated in the 1800's here in America through the stories of Washington Irving, the cartoons of Thomas Nast and the 1822 poem by Clement



Moore, which begins, “*Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.*”<sup>1</sup>



I am sure if St. Nicholas were here today, he would not want our time focused upon Santa Claus, instead, he would want all the attention to go to the one who came to town about 2000 years ago. Since Jesus came to earth, the world has not been the same since.

We all would have to admit that the world has been ruined and perverted the rejection of the Savior of Bethlehem. The praise due Jesus has given way to parties. The Savior has been replaced by Santa. The Glory due Jesus has been exchanged for gifts. The bowing and bending of knees has given way to ribbons and bows. I want to remind you this morning that the Christmas season is a whole lot more than boxes, bows, and ribbons. It is more than trees, tinsel, and lights. It certainly is more than reindeer, rooftops and Ho, Ho, Ho's.

I am aware that people are going to continue to follow all their Christmas traditions. But I do want people to know that “It wasn't Santa who came to town that first Christmas. It was Jesus. This morning, let me remind you once again what happened that first Christmas day.

### I. A Providential Decree (Luke 2:1-5)<sup>2</sup>

We first see a providential decree given.

Caesar Augustus issued a decree for all the known world to be taxed. It was not a lucky coincidence that resulted in Jesus being born in Bethlehem. It was God's divine plan being

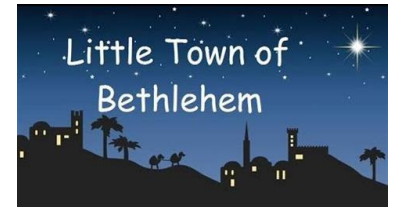
<sup>1</sup> Information on Santa Claus from Sermon Notebook, “What Would Santa Say About Christmas” Luke 2:1-20

<sup>2</sup> Outline from Sermon Notebook

worked out through the most unusual way. God knew Mary would be the one that would give birth to the Lamb of God. He knew over 700 years before the birth of Jesus where He would be born.

### A. The Promise

God's word records in Micah 5:2 the location of where the Messiah would be born. We find the Old Testament prophet, proclaiming this: “*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me, the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose going forth are from old, from everlasting.*” (Micah 5:2)



When the wise men came to see the infant King, they stopped in Jerusalem to inquire as to where the King would be born. Even the chief priests and scribes knew that Bethlehem would be the home of the future Ruler of Israel.

During Jesus' lifetime, many knew the future King would be born in Bethlehem, but because Jesus grew up in Nazareth, they discounted Him as being the future leader of the Jewish people. (John 1:46; John 7:41-42.)

### B. The Problem

I am sure when Mary and Joseph accepted the news of who Jesus really was; it never occurred to them that they needed to relocate to Bethlehem in order to fulfill prophecy. After all, they were living in Nazareth. Traveling the 80 to 90 miles to Bethlehem as an expectant mother would be hard, difficult, and even dangerous. But because Joseph was from the house of David, he had to travel back to the ancestral



home of David, Bethlehem. God masterfully arranged a pagan emperor to issue a decree and move them temporarily there to fulfill the first of many prophecies.

## II. A Promised Delivery (Luke 2:6-7)

Secondly, we see a promised delivery is sent.

The scriptural account of the scene in which Jesus was born is very sparse. It says, *“So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.*

*And she brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”*

The Bible makes no mention of a barn or a cave. No mention of cattle lowing, or donkeys bowing. Simply she gave birth to a boy and wrapped him in a blanket of some kind, and laid him in a feeding box because there was no where else for Him to lay. Every time I think about this scene, I am utterly amazed.



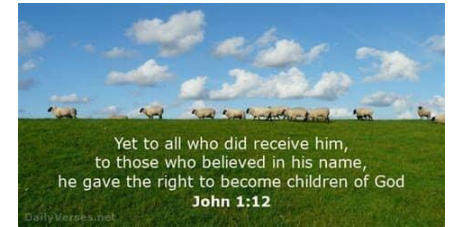
The creator of the Universe – the deliverer of Israel – the Alpha and Omega – the future sacrifice for all mankind – is asleep in a box used to feed animals?

Could it be that God wanted even lowly shepherds to come and find the Lamb of God? Could it be so that the poor could identify with Him? Could it be so that any old sinner – no matter how down in the gutter he drags himself – can find a Savior there?

As Mary and Joseph entered Bethlehem, they found there was no room for Jesus. There was no room in the inn for Jesus and His family. During His life, Jesus said there was no place for Him to lay His head at times.

In John 1:11 it says, *“He came to His own, and His own, did not receive Him.”* Even today, there is no room in some people’s lives for Jesus.

The good news is found in the next verse in John 1:12 which says this: *“But as many as receive Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”* You and I can be accepted and forgiven by God, if we only accept God’s Son.

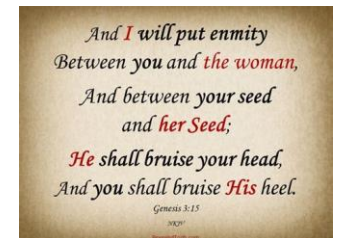


## B. Picture His Birth

Can you picture in your mind the birth of a King, lying in a feed box wrapped in swaddling cloths? I have read that “swaddling” clothes were like bandages. It is similar to the same way in which a person was wrapped up when they died. Isn't that an interesting picture of Jesus being wrapped in the same type of material in which he would be almost 33 years later? Why did Jesus come anyway? He came to die for you and me!

## C. The Purpose of His Birth

The purpose of Jesus’ birth was for the salvation of mankind. Jesus was a baby born to die. In Genesis 3:15 we see a prophecy that one day, a person would come and destroy the serpent that deceived Eve. The one that did that would receive injury, but not unto death. From that day in the Garden of Eden, sacrifices have been offered pointing to the coming Redeemer of mankind. Every sacrificed lamb, ram, goat, bird pointed to Christ’s coming.



- That is why Noah built an Ark, to preserve a remnant.
- That is why Abraham built an Altar, pointing to the Father in Heaven one day sacrificing His Only Son on that same Hill of Moriah.
- That is why Moses built a Tabernacle to prepare a Holy Nation that could receive a Holy Savior. Jesus would be the Lamb slain under the rituals and rules kept by the Priests of God from the Days in the Wilderness to the Advent of Christ.
- That is why Solomon built a Temple where the sacrifices could point to a coming Sacrifice. Jesus poured out his blood on that hill called Calvary

The purpose of His birth was to die for you and me. He came so that when we die, we might live. He died so we might live.

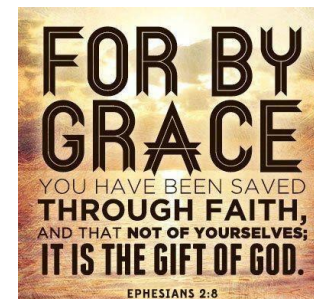
### III. A Powerful Display (Luke 2:8-20)

Third, we find that God has given us a powerful display. The birth of Jesus was the power of God on display for all the eyes of men to see.

#### A. The Power of God's Grace (Luke 2:8-12)

Those shepherds that were nearby in fields were some of the first to see the hand of God manifested. Shepherds were the outcasts of society. They were seen as dirty and filthy. Even though they watched over the lambs that would be offered in Jerusalem, they were considered unclean and un-welcomed in the temple. But they were the ones chosen by God to hear the first birth announcement. How appropriate for the ones that raised lambs would meet the Lamb of God that would take the sins of the world away.

Isn't that the way God works? He came to us while we were yet sinners. While we were rejected by men – God brought the good news to us! Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* God works with us on a Grace basis not a works basis. We can only receive it and believe it.



#### B. The Power of God's Glory (Luke 2:13-14)

When the angels of God met the shepherds there in the field, they said,

*“Glory to God in the Highest,  
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men.”*

Embedded in the nature of angels is the capacity to praise God. Job 38:7 indicates they shouted for joy when the foundations of the earth were laid. I don't have a biblical verse to support this, but I am sure every angel ever created, was there at the birth of Jesus Christ, proclaiming the good news of Jesus' incarnation. Revelation 7:11-12 tells of a future day when the angels, the elders, and four living creatures will kneel before the throne of God worshipping and praising Him.



In Luke we see the God of heaven stepping off of His throne and coming in the form of human flesh. Their words of praise reach new heights! Even though the angels do not fully understand God's love for mankind (as scripture says, “they desired to look into these things”) they praise God. If angels who do not understand God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness – and they praise God, how much more should we be willing to

praise God because we have received such a wonderful, unsurpassed gift!

David expressed it this way in Psalm 40:1-2, *“I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of horrible pit, Out of miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth – Praise to our God; many will see it and fear and will trust in the Lord.”*



We as God’s people should praise Him!

### C. The Power of God’s Gift (Luke 2:15-20)

If you really grasp the enormity of the gift God has sent us, you will forever be changed. The shepherds that met Jesus were forever changed. Even though they came out of curiosity, they left rejoicing in the glory of eternal life. They came wondering but they left witnessing about the One who had found them.

2 Corinthians 5:17 reminds us, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”*

### Conclusion

What are you looking for this Christmas? Is it some material thing that you are longing to own, and if you don’t get it, you will be disappointed? If you seek the Christ of Christmas, then you will never be disappointed. Those that still seek Him will find Him. And all who find Him come away changed forever.

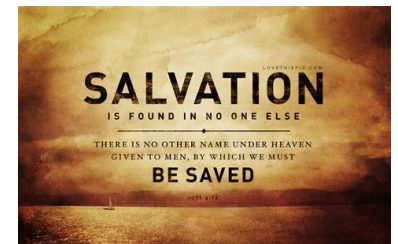


No it wasn’t Santa Claus who came to town that first Christmas. It was Immanuel – God with us! His name is Jesus. He is still here, looking for all who have room for Him in their lives.

There was a gift for each of us left under the tree of life 2000 years ago by Him whose birthday we celebrate this season of the year. The gift is withheld from no one, but some have left their gift unclaimed. Some people have accepted the gift but have failed to open it and remove the wrapping paper and look inside. If they did, then they would discover a wonderful Savior and a wonderful gift from God. The contents would be the same in each package, the words contained therein would say, “All that the Father has is thine also: Take and live!”<sup>3</sup>

So many people are chasing an illusive dream. We want to find joy this season in the buying and giving of gifts. We try to find meaning in the comings and goings of events. We hunt for that place of peace, but it escapes us. We will only find our contentment when we find the Christ child of Christmas.

The best gift we can ever receive is salvation for our souls. This is only offered by Jesus Christ. There is no other name in all the earth where by we can be saved. That word is Jesus! We have a gift that we can give away that doesn’t diminish the gift we have. We can share the gift of salvation this Christmas. Let us share our Christmas gift with others. It is the gift of the Christ Child – Immanuel – God with us.



### LET US PRAY

<sup>3</sup> A Treasury of Bible Illustrations, No. 182, Open the Gift Package