

No Room for Jesus!

Luke 2:1-7

Here, in Luke 2, the author records the actual birth of Christ in a mere seven verses. After briefly outlining the circumstances leading to Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem, Luke states rather matter of factly that:

“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

Here is God Himself coming into the world, not amid great fanfare, pomp and ceremony, and royal welcome, but in great solitude and simplicity, unnoticed by all but a few. The words of John immediately spring to mind:

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (John 1:10-11)

Twenty centuries have passed since then and the relentless march of time and events has once again brought us to that season of the year in which many celebrate the birth of the Christ-child. The question is, “Has our world come any nearer to that level of discernment required to differentiate between what is of paramount importance and what is only marginally significant?” Are we wise enough to understand that often what appears to be ultra-significant at the time may soon fade into insignificance, becoming nothing more than a footnote to history, if not forgotten altogether? Conversely, some things of rather humble beginning, appearing to have little or no significance at all, end up casting their shadow across the whole landscape of history.

Have we learned to tell the difference, or are we easily seduced by whatever is making the loudest noise and biggest headlines at the moment? For example, someone has said that if Dan Rather or Peter Mansbridge had been living in 1809, their evening news broadcasts would have concentrated on Austria, not on America or Britain or the Middle East. You see, in 1809 the attention of the entire world was on Napoleon as he swept in conquest across Austria. Nothing else was half as significant on the international scene! This diminutive dictator from France cast his shadow across the world, and from Trafalgar to Waterloo, his name was a synonym for superiority.

At that time of invasions and battles, certain babies were being born in Britain and America. But who was interested in babies and bottles, cradles and cribs, while history was being made? What could possibly be more important in 1809 than the fall of Austria? Who cared about English-speaking infants that year when Europe was in the limelight? The world simply did not suspect that a veritable host of thinkers and statesmen were drawing their first breath in 1809:

- William Gladstone was born in Liverpool.
- Alfred Lord Tennyson began his life in Lincolnshire.
- Oliver Wendell Holmes cried out in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Edgar Allan Poe started his brief and tragic life a few miles away in Boston.
- A physician named Darwin and his wife gave birth to a boy they named Charles.
- A rugged log cabin in Kentucky was filled with the infant cries of a newborn boy by the name of Abraham Lincoln.

All that and more happened in 1809 ... but who noticed? After all, the destiny of the world was being shaped on battlefields in Austria - or was it? No, indeed! Today, only a handful of history buffs could name even one Austrian campaign, but who can measure the impact of those other lives?

What appeared to be ultra-significant to the world has been all but forgotten! What seemed to be very insignificant – the birth of half a dozen babies - was, in fact, the genesis of an era!

Now go back eighteen centuries before that. Who cared about the birth of a baby in a stall in Bethlehem while the world was watching Rome in all her splendour? Bounded on the west by the Atlantic, on the east by the Euphrates, on the north by the Rhine and the Danube, and on the south by the Sahara Desert, the Roman Empire was as vast as it was vicious. Filled with political intrigue, racial tension, rampant immorality, and enormous military might, Imperial Rome occupied everyone's attention and conversation.

Palestine existed under the crush of Rome's heavy pagan boot. All eyes were on Augustus Caesar, the Emperor who demanded a census in order to determine a measurement for increasing taxes. At that time who was interested in an obscure, anonymous young couple, making an eighty-mile trip south from Nazareth to Bethlehem? What could possibly be more important than Caesar's decisions and decrees in Rome? Who cared about a Jewish baby born in a stall in Bethlehem? The answer is God did! Without realizing it, Augustus was only an errand boy for the fulfilment of the prophet Micah's prediction:

"But you, Bethlehem ... though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." (Micah 5:2)

While Rome was busy making history, the God of all history arrived – the eternal One who existed before history on earth began. He pitched his fleshly tent in silence on a bed of straw, in a stable, under a star. The world didn't even notice! Reeling from the wake of Alexander the Great, Herod the Great, and Augustus Caesar, the world overlooked the Christ-child. It still does! The world is too busy, too preoccupied to take much notice of its own Creator – and Saviour!

The world never has had much room for Christ. There was no room for Him in the synagogues of his day. There was no room for Him in Herod's palace. Neither was there any room for Him in Pilate's court. The only place there was room for Jesus was on a cross! Today there is little or no room for the Master in our universities, in our parliaments, in our shopping malls, or in our business concourses. It is a sad reflection of the lack of room for Jesus in the hearts of men. We have taken Christ even out of Christmas!

Norman Vincent Peale tells the story of two men who were standing on Fifth Avenue at 57th Street in New York City. It was during the Christmas rush and they were waiting at a red light. One of the men was greatly irritated by all the traffic. "This city is totally disorganized," he growled. "Look at this traffic! It's chaos! Something ought to be done about it."

The other man was more philosophical. He replied rather thoughtfully, “You know, it’s astounding, the romance of it. Two thousand years ago there was a baby born of peasant parents in a little out-of-the-way place halfway around the world from here. The parents had no money or social standing, yet two thousand years later, that little child creates a traffic jam on Fifth Avenue, one of the most sophisticated streets in the world. This irritates you. I think it should fascinate you.”

This Advent season, we must be careful to differentiate between what is ultra-significant and what is insignificant. What is ultra-significant is the fact that King has come among us, offering a season of grace and amnesty, saying to the world, “*Now is the acceptable time, today is the day of salvation.*”

What is ultra-significant is that the same King is coming again – and we must be ready for Him. We must be about the King’s business as we faithfully wait and watch for His appearing. We must keep on witnessing, keep on worshipping Him, watching for Him, and working for Him all the more. This is the meaning of Advent!

I am grateful that, unlike the world, you have made room for Jesus. I know that you have made room for Him. Otherwise you would not be in this worship service two thousand years after His first Advent. Nevertheless, we must all ask a question: “Have I made enough room for Jesus?” We do not want to find that we have relegated Jesus to the stable of our lives. He deserves to have full occupancy of every room, every chamber of our being. He deserves this because of who he is and because he gave up so much to come for us. He came from a glorious throne to a lowly stable to say to the world:

I have come for ordinary people, for those the world so often counts as insignificant in the grand scheme of things. But I do not count you as insignificant. To me you are all ultra-significant! So I have come in humbleness of heart to a lowly stable – not just for rulers and the rich – but also for you, whoever and wherever you are. I offer to come to the manger of your heart. Make room for me there!

If the birth of seemingly ordinary men like William Gladstone, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles Darwin, and Abraham Lincoln is now seen as the genesis of an era, then how much more significant is the birth of Christ. His coming represents the genesis of not merely an era, but the genesis of eternal salvation for all who believe. The most significant thing any of us can do with our life is to make room for Jesus in our heart – much room, all the room there is.

When the fleeting events of time and tide have all receded into history and become footnotes or forgotten, Christ and eternity will still loom before us. The One who began his trek on earth in a lonely stall, surrounded only by his parents and a few shepherds, will reside forever on the throne of Heaven, surrounded by a numberless host of the redeemed of all ages. Thank God that you will be there! Invite others to be there! That is what is truly significant.