

A Time Filled with Memories and Mystery

A Message by James R. Newby

Text: Luke 2:1-20

Tonight and tomorrow is a time filled with memories and mystery. Already tonight, we are recalling our past Christmas experiences. I remember walking with my father to the Christmas Eve Worship Service at Minneapolis Friends Meeting. When we returned home, I was allowed to open one gift, which was usually a pair of pajamas, hand-made by my mother. There was the time when my sister and I received those Davey Crockett coon skin hats, and going against my parent's Quaker principles, little plastic toy rifles to go with our hats. Like Davey, for many days after Christmas we could also go hunting in the Tennessee wilderness. There was the one year that my little brother won a drug store drawing, the prize being a huge stocking filled with lots of toys and candy. For a small boy, it was the best Christmas ever.

Of course, as a father, I have many memories of a little girl and her excitement on Christmas eve and Christmas morning. I know that all of you have your memories as well...some of them good and loving, and some of them difficult and painful. Into the mix of my good memories are the ones of my father dying in December, and opening the gifts on Christmas morning which

he had already purchased before his sudden death. There is also the time when I was living alone and spent Christmas Eve and Christmas Day on the coast of North Carolina. The manager of the motel in which I was staying called me at noon on Christmas Eve and told me that the office and telephone operator would be going off duty, and would not return until December 26. No calls could come in or go out. This was before anyone carried a cell phone. I had purchased some candles, which I lit and placed around me on the floor, where I sat listening to National Public Radio, *weeping and remembering*.

They are all here tonight--all of those memories of Christmas. And something else is here as well..the *mystery* surrounding our celebration. What is more mysterious than the incarnation--the word made flesh and dwelling among us? Over the past two-thousand years, Kings have come and gone. As significant as Herod and Julius Caesar were, no one celebrates their births. Dictators and Presidents are on the world stage for a brief while, but they are soon forgotten. Doesn't it seem strange that after all of this time we are still celebrating the birth of child who was born into such poverty that a stable was his maternity ward?

He came into this world quietly and mysteriously, this Jesus. There were a few shepherds and angels present, but no Marine Bands or huge parades to mark the occasion. I am reminded of Holden in the book, *Catcher In The Rye*.

Holden takes his girl friend to see the colorful Christmas extravaganza at Radio City Music Hall in New York. The lights are there--the sound of well tuned instruments, the activity, the songs and first rate professional staging. But Holden sees through it, and says in a clear distinct way, "Old Jesus probably would have gotten sick if He could see it," he says. "All those fancy costumes and all. The thing Jesus would have liked would be the guy that plays the kettledrum in the orchestra."

"She gave birth to her first born son, and laid him in a manger." It was a night filled with mystery, that night when Jesus was born. So many questions surround it, and so much has happened since. And yet, here we are, 2000 years later, celebrating the mystery of that night.

And so, this evening, may we recall with joy, and yes, even some pain, the memories of our own Christmas experiences. All of the joy and all of the pain are a part of who we are. And let us also marvel at the mystery surrounding that *first* Christmas, when the son of God took on human form and dwelt among us. Our world and those of us here tonight need that special message of hope that Christmas gives to us. In the words of the multitude of angels, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace and good will among all people."