

# Rejoice in the Birth of Jesus the Messiah!

A Sermon by Reverend Alice Marcrum  
Christmas Day, 2005

We have gathered here this morning to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. There are many traditions for celebrating the birth of Jesus; they are as varied as there are people and families. I was reminded the other day of one of the traditions peculiar to our family for Christmas. Our youngest daughter, who sang here, last night, remarked that Santa always stops by the Godiva store on his way to the Marcrum house. As I was leaving the house today, I noticed that Santa had not failed to fulfill his duty concerning what has apparently become a Marcrum family tradition.

My grandmother, who was born in 1895, and has since passed away, had a much less extravagant Christmas when she was growing up. For her and her four sisters, who lived on a small farm in South Georgia, a good Christmas was when they each got in their stocking an orange or tangerine, a peppermint stick and some nuts, usually the native pecans. Instead of store bought items, their mother would give them special gifts that she had hand made for them. Even though by today's standards, it wasn't very much, for my grandmother and her sisters it was more than enough.

My grandmother's home was a log cabin built by her father, who was a circuit rider preacher. They ate what they grew and whatever my great-grandmother could catch in the pond near their home. Any extra money came from the local churches where my great-grandfather preached. They did not have much in worldly riches, but were wealthy in other ways. Ways that no amount of money can buy.

If we go back much further in time to the very first Christmas, I believe we will find an even simpler setting. The place is Bethlehem in Judea under the Roman rule in a stable filled with braying donkeys, spitting camels, tired oxen and perhaps a few curious sheep. The sheep are there because they have followed their shepherds to this stable to find the first Christmas gift. The first Christmas gift was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger or feeding trough. The gift was a small baby born of a virgin, who was engaged to a carpenter.

The shepherds were the small baby's first guests. They were not the outstanding citizens of the town. No, they were just the opposite. Shepherds were considered to be the lowliest of the lower class and were often accused of grazing their sheep on other people's property. Treated as outcasts by men, these are the ones to whom the angels of God appeared and proclaimed the birth of the long expected Messiah.

The scriptures tell us that when the angels had left them they did not converse about forming a committee to look into and study this amazing thing they had just witnessed. They did not take a vote on whether or not they should obey the instructions given to them by the angels. Instead, the scriptures tell us that **“they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.”** Perhaps that is why they were chosen to be the Son of God’s first guests. Perhaps it was because of their simple nature to immediately obey the instructions of the angels that they were chosen over kings and generals. Perhaps we can learn something from their humble obedience.

Today, we try so hard to make Christmas special that I am concerned that in our busyness, we may forget the simplicity of our Savior’s birth. It was not extravagance and riches that were present at our dear Lord’s birth. Instead it was a noisy stable filled with animals and straw that first housed the Savior of the world.

The King of Kings was not greeted by dignitaries at His birth, but by the poorest of the poor. Shepherds, tending their flocks, ran to meet Him. They came not on camels, but by foot with their sheep probably following close behind them. Can you imagine the noise they must have made, these jubilant heaven dazed men running through the streets of Bethlehem in the middle of the night in search of a newborn lying in a manger?

The citizens who slept through their trip into the city were certainly awakened as these same shepherds with their sheep returned to their hillside openly praising the Lord. The scriptures read, **“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”**

As much as we like to think of that holy night as a quiet one, it was far from quiet. The air was filled first with noisy animals, then with singing angels, and finally with noisy shepherds. The quiet little town of Bethlehem was not as silent as we like to sing about in our beloved carols. It was a night when the very air was filled with the joyous praise of God’s gift to the world.

So today we rejoice in the birth of Jesus the Messiah into the world. Whatever traditions we may follow to remember this earth changing event let us remember the simplicity of His birth. It is so easy to get caught up in the busyness of the day that we forget it is a gift to be simple. The wisdom of the Amish in their hymn on simplicity sums up the simple beauty of Jesus’ birth.

***“Tis the gift to be simple,  
tis the gift to be free,  
tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
and when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
’twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
When true simplicity is gained***

*to bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,  
to turn,  
turn,  
will be our delight  
til by turning,  
turning we come down right."*