**Luke 2:1-7** December 25, 2016

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Christmas Day

 *Luke 2:1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3And everyone went to his own town to register.*

 *4So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7and 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.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

 Presidential inauguration in 26 days and counting! There will be marching bands and singers, thousands of people, limousines, television cameras, reporters. They will be there for the first day of the next president’s term. It happens every four years. And even if it should be a president’s second term, that doesn’t make the event any smaller. A president’s inauguration, his first day in office, is a very big thing.

 A change of command ceremony might be quite a bit smaller than a presidential inauguration, yet it’s still a big deal. Bands play, hundreds attend, maybe a television camera, a few reporters.

 We take note when new mayors take office or even at the installation of pastors—one thing people like to do is to take note when a new “in-charge” steps up to the plate.

 But not with Jesus. At his first day on the job, practically no one noticed. Today we consider

**Why No One Noticed Jesus’ Birth**

**I. A Surprisingly Ordinary Birth**

 Luke chapter 2 is about the most important person in human history, the Savior of all mankind. He arrives on the scene to inaugurate his mission to save mankind. You would think that when he shows up, there would be parties in the streets.

 Yet, if there is one thing that stands out in Luke 2, it is the complete lack of pomp and circumstance. It is the most ordinary event imaginable. Even the way that Luke talks about Caesar Augustus’ census makes you think that this event, the birth of Jesus, is like a dried leaf blown wherever the wind blows it. Joseph and Mary were over here in Nazareth, then because the Roman emperor got a bee in his bonnet about counting people, they have to get on their donkey and go to Bethlehem; victims rather than makers of history.

 Oh, I am sure that Jesus’ birth was a big thing to Joseph and Mary. But it was just another ordinary baby born to ordinary people. Sure, there is a story to it. “I mean really, Joseph—an 80-mile donkey ride for your wife in her ninth month. What were you thinking? She’ll never let you forget it!” But they were young and strong and made it through with a story to tell. Just the ordinary sort of story we all have in our lives.

 When you look at the story of Jesus’ birth in the first seven verses of Luke 2, the thing that stands out is that nothing stands out. Luke paints a picture of Jesus’ birth with such an absence of detail and lack of notable events that we feel compelled to fill in the blanks. Now there is nothing wrong with imagining details. God made our minds in such a way that just fill in the gaps. Ever talk to somebody on the phone a lot, and then when you finally meet them you think, “You don’t look anything like I imagined”?

 The problem is that many of the details we fill in, actually rob Jesus’ birth of its ordinariness. Was it really that the people of Bethlehem were a bunch of selfish snobs who couldn’t have cared less about a young expecting couple? Or were the Bethlehemites people who, in a hard place, with all the rooms already taken, did the best they could? Was Jesus’ first night really an especially silent night? Or did the dogs bark at the cats roaming the neighborhood, like every other night? Were the stars brightly shining? Or was it cloudy? It’s all guess-work.

 Here are the few details that we do know. First, when Joseph and Mary found that there was no room in the inn, someone found a place for the couple in their 1st century equivalent of a garage, out of the rain and dew and cold. A little smelly perhaps, but not to commoners living 2,000 years ago.

 The second thing we know is that when the baby was born, they put baby clothes on hand on him ***“She wrapped him in cloths.”***

 And the third thing we know is that Mary did what every sensible mother has done since the beginning of time, she put the baby in the warmest, safest place possible, she ***“placed him in the manger.”*** Hardly earth-shattering.

 It was such an ordinary birth that no one would have noticed, except his parents. Now at this point you are going to say, “But pastor, you're are leaving out a really big part of the Christmas story. People *did* come to the Savior’s birth. Shepherds came. They were amazed, They praised God. Pastor, we know about the Wise Men. They came and worshiped. People knew!” True, but even the shepherds and Wise Men prove the point. The only reason the shepherds knew about Jesus was because God sent a division of angels to light up the night with heavenly ordinance–but nothing in the baby himself brought them. The Wise Men were astronomers. They wouldn’t have known about this child except that God did something amazing—we’re not quite sure what—up in the skies. But nothing about the child drew them.

 That is what God the Father wanted. That is what Jesus wanted. Jesus wanted to be like us in every way. He wanted a surprisingly ordinary birth that in itself would draw no attention. That is why, basically, no one noticed.

**II. No One Noticed because Jesus’ Work *Needed* an Ordinary Birth**

 But if Jesus is really all that important, why an ordinary birth? Now there is a good question: Why an ordinary birth?

 The unbelieving world cannot really understand what all the noise is about. To them it sounds, at best, like the story of a little baby born in tough circumstances, who made it anyway. So they mix in a love, joy, hope and peace and we have a nice story. That is the unbelieving world’s take.

 But that is not the message around Jesus’ birth. When the angel announced to Joseph that his fiancé would soon have a child, the central message was that *“he will save his people from their sins.”* When the first angel told the shepherds about a child born in the city of David, the angel called the baby a Savior – humanity needs to be saved from the ocean of its sins, not taught how to be better swimmers. When the entire host of heavenly angels appeared to the shepherds, they announced, *“On earth peace to men on whom God’s favor rests.”* Look carefully at the grammar and you will see that the angels were not talking about peace on earth – like most people think the Christmas message is – but peace from God to people because their horrible, damnable sins would be forgiven in this little Savior.

 The Savior Jesus was born was to do real work! Someone had to come and save us from our sins. And that required not a magnificent king, telling people what to do, but it required a plumber – someone willing to get under the sink and get dirty, to get the job done with his own hands, because no one else was equal to the task. And so Jesus came, oh so silently, as a sign of the sort of work he had to do, humble work. He came as a servant of all. He came to live and die for us, like a good servant should, so that we might live! Based on the kind of grunt work that Jesus had to do, his unnoticed birth was appropriate because he did not come to be noticed by the world but to get something done!

 His birth was consistent with the life he had to live.

 For the rest of his life, Jesus’ followed the pattern of his humble, almost unnoticed birth. He grew up in a small, out-of-the-way town. He learned to be a carpenter. He had brothers and sisters. He chose ordinary people, fishermen and tax collectors, to be his students and then his messengers. When talking about his own life, Jesus said, *“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head”* (Lk 9:58). In death he died like the worst of the earth, and even after his death he had to rely on someone not of his family to bury him.

 Everything about Jesus’ life breathed a humility that most of us understand—and try to avoid. But it was his. He claimed it. He lived it. It was a humility required of one who would live every moment of his life to save the lives of others.

 That is why the Christian Christmas focuses on his humble birth.

**III. Christ’s First almost Unnoticed Coming Brings Us Joy**

 The reason Jesus could get this done, the reason he could accomplish what every other human has and will fail to do is because the birth of Jesus was completely *not* normal at one critical point. The one thing that made Jesus’ birth truly unusual was the one thing that Joseph and Mary almost certainly tried to keep secret: Joseph was not the baby’s father.

 When Mary was told that she would conceive while still being a virgin, she was mystified. Then God’s messenger explained, *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”*

 Jesus was no ordinary person. Human? Yes. Fully human? Yes. But more. At the birth of Jesus, God became human. Just so you know, we call this the incarnation. In the incarnation God affirms us and our value.

 A wise man once stated, “We are not zeroes to God.” We are sinful. We are stubborn and rebellious and determined to go our own ways. We are twisted and perverted from what God wants us to be. Morally speaking we have a bad past, a terrible present, and a hopeless future. We are all these things, but we are not zeroes, and Jesus’ birth proves it. The incarnation validates us as valuable to God, however little our true value might be. He loves us, just because he loves us. When Jesus became one of us, when he stepped down from his heavenly throne and entered into human history, he proved that God considers us valuable, worth saving.

 Many a high-level politician tries to look like the ordinary person. Politicians pick up shovels at work-sites, they go shopping at supermarkets, they try to assure us that they are just like the rest of us. Usually their very attempts to convince us that they are very much like us only convince us that they are nothing like us. They don’t know which end of the shovel to hold. They don’t know how to use a self-serve check-out at Wal-Mart. But when Jesus came to earth to be one of us, he didn’t come as some sort of publicity stunt. He didn’t have a five minute photo-op in a baby crib. He stayed. And he lived, and he mourned, and he laughed, and he taught, and he got hungry, and he felt pain, and he died, like us.

 And that makes me proud. It makes me proud of Jesus, that he became like me, even though he was too good for it. In that cry of a tiny baby in a manger in a stable in Bethlehem, almost completely unheard by the world around him, I hear him beginning the most important work that would ever be done: my salvation.

 At Jesus’ coming at Christmas, perhaps the biggest reason for joy is simply that he showed up. His work to save us would come in the following years. But the very fact that he showed up on time tells me that he noticed me, he noticed you. Rejoice in the hope that this Savior’s humble birth gives. Amen.