



December 4, 2011  
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## *The Creep that Stole Christmas: Indifference*

Luke 2:8-20

Last Sunday, during second service, a bunch of us returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was great. It always is. If I could have my way, every member of this church would make it at least once in their lifetime. It was inspiring, life-changing, educational. We even had someone come to Christ! But sometimes we learn through our trials on those tours, and our trip into Bethlehem was one of those moments. *[video clip]*

That video was the first one I shot when we got inside the church. Then, we decided we WOULD stand in line. So, here's the next video... 90 minutes later. *[video clip]* About a half hour after that, we were finally next to go in when a security guard put his hand up and said, "Delegation." And we watched as a huge group skipped to the front of the line while we stood there... waiting. *[video clip]* After the "delegation" had taken about a million pictures, after two hours in line, we were finally allowed inside. And what did I do? Fall on my knees and worship? Pray and sing Christmas carols? Not exactly. Here's the last video I shot... quickly, before another rush of people came crushing in. *[video clip]*

So, did any of you notice a change in my attitude from Clip A to Clip D? How would you describe it? Frustrated, frazzled, fed up? Indifferent, maybe? To be honest, I had reached the point where I just wanted to get everyone into that cave, take their pictures and get out of Dodge! Escape the crowds, the hubbub, the "delegations," and the stinking line-cutters!!

Of course that was my eighth trip to Bethlehem. I didn't always feel that way. It was crowded the first time I visited. But I remember kneeling, praying, singing, pausing... I remember a sense of wonder at the thought that I was standing near the place where God became a man...where Jesus, my Savior, was born. Then I felt more like the very first visitors that Jesus received. Listen to their story on this second Advent Sunday.

Read Luke 2:8-20.

After we visited the Church of the Nativity, we went to a nearby village called Beit Sahour. Beit Sahour means, literally, "The Place of the Night Watch." Here, 2000 years ago, sleepy shepherds were jolted awake by the heavenly appearance of angels announcing the birth of the savior.

At first, of course, they were terrified. But when their hearts dropped back down out of their throats, they were excited, weren't they? "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened!" And after they make their journey they return, "glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen..." They were filled with wonder, weren't they? Excitement! Amazement! Not exactly what I experienced in Bethlehem last week.

Our Advent theme is “The Creep that stole Christmas.” What are the things in your life that creep in and steal the joy, the meaning, the wonder of Christmas? Pastor Jeremy talked about disappointment. Life has not turned out like you expected and that disappointment can lead to bitterness and unbelief. Here’s another creep: indifference. You the point where you find yourself saying, “I’m already sick of Christmas. I just want to get through it... just want to survive it... just want to get out the other end without too many parties, too much debt, too many family flare ups.” Too much bustle, too much hassle, too much...

As I stood there watching those line-cutters, I felt like they were the creeps that were stealing my Christmas. Who were they to push their way past us? We were a delegation... a Presbyterian delegation from Gig Harbor! But as I re-watched the video later, I saw something different about them. Reverence. Excitement. Wonder. I remember feeling that way once. But now, it had become an endurance race and I wasn’t going to give up! What happened to me?

Any of you feel that way about Christmas at times? Any of you expect to feel that way before Christmas is through? So, how do we push back the creep of indifference? How do we get back the wonder of Christmas?

The shepherds give us three ideas: testing, hurrying and spreading. First, they put God to the test. After the angel appeared and told them what was going on in Bethlehem, he said something interesting: “This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” After the angel left the shepherds said, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” In other words, let’s put God to the test! God said he would give us a sign. God said he would save us. Let’s see if He is as good as His word.”

The shepherds of Jesus’ time had a horrible reputation. Did you know that? They were considered the thieving, untrustworthy scumbags of their culture. The riff-raff. The low-lives. Everybody hated them. Everybody mistrusted them. In fact, the only ones lower on the Jewish social ladder than shepherds were whom? Lepers! We don’t realize how amazing it was that God would choose, of all people, shepherds to be the witnesses to the Savior’s birth. And to these despised people—who knew they were despised and probably lived up to that reputation—the angel offered a promise and a sign. “A savior has come for you, forgiveness has come for you, salvation has come for you, peace has come for you. I’ve sent a sign. Put me to the test and see if my promises aren’t true!”

If you find yourself blasé about Christmas, could it be that you’ve never really claimed God’s promises for yourself... never taken seriously the angel’s message for you? Have you ever said to yourself—or to your family or friends— “Hmmm, God says he came to save me. From myself. From my sins. From my past. From my reputation. I need saving. He promised to give me peace if I would believe him. I need peace. What do I have to lose if I take this Christmas message seriously and personally? I think I’ll put him to the test. I think I’ll say to Jesus, ‘Okay, do your thing. I need saving. I need forgiving. I need peace. I’m willing to put your promises to the test.’”

If Indifference—nonchalance—is the creep that is stealing your Christmas, could it be that you never really put God to the test... never really discovered how wonder-ful Jesus really

is? That you are treating this season as a children's holiday rather than a life-changing invasion by a gracious God? "Let's go see if this thing is true..."

They tested. Then they hurried. "So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger." I know...the last thing you need in your life is more hurry. And it might sound like crazy advice, especially at a time of year that is ALL about hurry. But sometimes hurrying is the appropriate response. When Cyndi went into labor with Cooper 16 Christmases ago...she didn't say, "Take your time getting me to the hospital." Actually, she didn't say much. She just kept going, "Hee, hee, hee, pah!" But I hurried! Believe me, I hurried! Because there was nothing more important and there was a real urgency about getting to it.

Our problem isn't necessarily that we hurry. Our problem is...we hurry after the wrong stuff. We hurry to be in line for Black Friday so that someone can shoot us with pepper spray. We hurry to be in our seats well before kickoff. We hurry to get our kids signed up for this team or that school. We hurry to pack more activity, more parties, more networking opportunities into our lives. But there is no sense of hurry—no sense of urgency—to our appointment with God.

We joke about how many folks come late to this church (and I realize that everyone has a different story) but if you knew that you were about to meet God—really knew that the Savior was about to teach you something from his Word and knew that you were about to be healed or transformed in some great way—wouldn't you be eager; wouldn't you hurry to get here? To get seated, to settle in and prepare yourself to watch for God's arrival? When it comes to worship and fellowship and personal time with Immanuel, could it be that you need to crank up the energy a little bit? Put a little hustle in your bustle? If you feel blasé on Sundays or at Christmas, maybe it's time you hurried towards the things of God.

They tested, they hurried, and they spread. "When they had seen [Jesus], they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them." This is the Year of Good News. Every Sunday you are hearing from people who are taking the challenge to open their mouths and share the Good News of Jesus with someone in their life. And there is nothing more wonder-producing than watching what happens to your loved ones when they actually listen to you.

You heard Addy's story today. Because someone spread the word of Jesus at a retreat, suddenly everything she had heard all her life became real and she put her trust in Jesus. On our trip to Israel, a 71 year old woman that I have been talking to and praying for, for two years, accepted Christ and was baptized in the Jordan. There is nothing like the look in the eyes of someone who has just discovered Jesus to rekindle the wonder in your own life. Obviously we are learning to share our faith this year because people need Jesus, for now and forever. But another benefit of spreading the good news of Jesus is that it reinvigorates our own spiritual life. Do you know how many people don't even know what the real story of Christmas is? Frosty, Rudolph, Miracle on 34th Street, Happy Holidays! A while back a mom was setting up the nativity scene and her child asked, "Where's the Drummer Boy?"

If you find yourself indifferent to Christmas, maybe you need to ask God for the courage to read Luke 1-2 to someone or tell that story to those who have never really heard it. Maybe that will pump some wonder back into your Christmas! And if you don't ever share your

faith with anyone, maybe indifference is the reason. Maybe you've stopped marveling at what Jesus has done for you.

Just so you know I'm doing better since Bethlehem. For the most part, my experience in Israel was wonder-ful, especially because I watched what it meant to 50 other people. But my rumble in the grotto reminded me of how easy it is to slip into indifference. So, on the scale of indifferent to wondrous—honestly, where do you find yourself this morning? We are about to come to the Lord's Table. Here's another place where Indifference can creep in; where we can go through the motions without pausing to marvel, to wonder at what it all means. God loved you. He sent his Son to save you. Whatever is crummy, broken, slimy, riff-raffy about our lives, He is prepared to forgive it and transform your life. That is wonder-ful! That is wondrous! So I invite you to hurry this morning to God's gracious table.

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **READ** the passage out loud.
- **REFLECT & APPLY INDIVIDUALLY:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.
- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
  1. Can you think of a time when you found the Christmas story most wondrous? Describe it.
  2. Why do we become blasé about a story that is so amazing? What do we learn from the shepherds that might help inject wonder back into our Christmas experience?