

Message #1077
Rev. Jack C. Longley

"WHAT WOULD THE WORLD BE LIKE WITHOUT JESUS?"

{Luke 1:26-38}

Trinity Presbyterian Church

December 12, 2004

THE BABY IS MISSING

He had been inspecting the church before the parishioners arrive for the first mass and had noted with approval that the aisles and pews had been swept and dusted after the midnight mass, and that lost purses, prayer books and gloves had been collected and sent to the parish rectory.

It was a little before five in the morning. Outside it was dark, and in the church, where only the old priest moved about, the yellow light from the candles flickered and threw shifting shadows on the arches and stone floor. Occasionally, a transient beam of candlelight dimly picked out the rich colors of the stained glass windows. It was cold, and except for the priest's slow tread, it was silent.

On his way back to the sacristy, he paused beside the crèche to say a Christmas prayer of greeting to the Christ Child. On the little model stage, with admirable realism, the sacred scene was shown. Through the open door you could see the night sky and the star that had led the shepherds to the stable; the shepherds, in fact, were just entering, in attitudes of adoration; livestock were in the stalls; and in the center was the Holy Family, looking down into the manger.

The priest frowned and leaned closer. The whisper of his exclamation rustled through the church. The manger was empty! The Christ Child--the little plaster doll that represented the infant savior--was gone!

Hurriedly, and with growing agitation, the priest made a search that started in the vicinity of the manger and then took him, bent and peering, through the aisles again. He called the church sexton, then the assistant pastor and all the parish fathers. But none of them could offer any explanation. They discussed it long; and in the end, shaking their heads and surveying one another sorrowfully, they accepted the truth they had been trying to evade. The figure of the infant savior had not been mislaid, or lost; it had been stolen!

With a solemnity befitting the occasion, the pastor reported the theft to the congregation that assembled for the first mass. In a voice stern and yet trembling with outraged emotion, he spoke of the shocking nature of the deed, and of the dreadful sacrilege that had been committed. His gaze swept the congregation, as if searching the innermost thoughts of each man and woman. "The Christ Child," he said, "must be returned to the crèche before this Christmas Day is over!" Then, in silence, he strode from the pulpit.

At each succeeding mass he repeated this adjuration, but to no avail.

The manger remained empty. Toward the end of the Christmas afternoon the pastor, gray-faced and heavy-hearted, set out on a meditative stroll through the wintry streets of his parish.

It was while he was on this walk that he saw ahead of him one of the smallest members of his flock, a little boy of five or six named Johnny Mullaney. Shabbily bundled against the cold, Johnny was trudging up the sidewalk, dragging proudly behind him a toy express wagon, bright red and obviously Christmas new.

The priest was touched by the realization of the sacrifices and the scrimplings that the purchase of a toy like this must have entailed; for the family was poor. Here was a needed glow to warm his heart and to renew his faith in human nature. He quickened his step and overtook the little boy, intending to wish him a Merry

Christmas and to exclaim admiringly over the beauty of the wagon. But as he drew nearer, this benevolent plan was suddenly put out of his mind by the discovery that the wagon was not empty--it contained, in fact, the figure of the Christ Child, now wrapped and blanketed, but not quite hidden.

Grimly the priest stopped Johnny. Severely he lectured him. The boy was only a little boy, and one must, of course, make allowances--but nevertheless he was old enough to understand that stealing was a sin, and that to rob the church of a sacred image was a very great sin indeed. Now, in ringing tones, the priest made this plain to Johnny, who stood looking up at him with clear eyes that seemed guiltless--filling now, however, with what must be penitent tears.

"But, Father," the small boy quavered, when at last the priest had finished his tirade, "I didn't steal the Christ Child. It wasn't like that at all!" He gulped, and went on: "It was just that I've been praying to Him for a red wagon for a Christmas present--and I promised Him that if I got it, I'd take Him out for the first ride!"

SO...WHAT IF...JESUS HAD NOT BEEN BORN?

OR...IF...HEROD HAD SUCCEEDED IN MURDERING HIM AS AN INFANT?

In the movie, "It's a Wonderful Life" starring Jimmy Stewart, the main character gets a chance to see what life would be like had he never been born.

...the main point: each person's life has impact on someone else's.

...there would be gaping holes if you had not been born

...think about it!

So, what if Jesus had not been born?

What difference would it make?

How would the world be different?

It would be radical!

Jesus has been the most dominant figure in the history of the world!

...it is from His birth that most of the human race dates their calendars

...BC

...AD

On the lighter side--had Jesus not come into the world...

...we wouldn't be here today

...there would be no Christmas holiday

...no Christmas cards

...no Christmas trees

...no Santa Claus

...no presents

...no Christmas Carols

More seriously--had Jesus not come into the world...

...there would be no churches

...no New Testament

...no crucifixion--therefore, no forgiveness

...no resurrection--no hope for the future

...no eternal life

...no promise of His return

...the Bible would be basically a hoax

...just stories of ancient Jewish history

Finally--if Jesus had not come into the world...

...there would be no mediator between us and God

...no way to communicate with God through prayer

...there would be no Lord's Prayer

...most of all NO RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST

...no salvation

...no eternal life
...pretty hopeless!

CONCLUSION

Listen to what Dr. James Allen Frances wrote--a narrative about Jesus solitary life...
"He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village, where He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a home. He didn't go to college. He never visited a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself.

He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. When He was dying, His executioners gambled for His garments, the only property He had on earth. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race.

All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of people on this earth as much as that one solitary life."

Do you take Him for granted?

What is your PERSONAL relationship with Him today?

Whom are you worshipping this morning?

Christmas is about the fact that Jesus came to this earth.

Christmas is about the fact that Jesus is here now standing at the door of our hearts knocking so that we might open the door and let Him move in and be in relationship with Him.

Christmas is about the fact that Jesus Christ is coming again.

My prayer...in the meantime...do not take Him for granted.

...He came

...He comes

...and He's coming again!