



STRANGELY OUT OF PLACE

LUKE 2:8-20

Occasionally you will see things that seem strangely out of place.

I am sure if you saw someone in skinny jeans and flannel mixing it up at the opera, that would feel a bit odd. But it would be just as odd to see someone rocking formal wear at the local coffee roaster or brewpub. It's not that there are any rules against wearing flannel to the opera, or a tux to a coffee shop, but you can expect some strange looks if you do.

When we read the Christmas story there are several things that seem strangely out of place. On the one hand, Christ's birth is so ordinary that it largely went unnoticed. On the other hand it is so extraordinary that we dare not notice.

It would not have been unusual for a young couple to give birth in the home of a relative. That happened everyday. It's a bit unusual to give birth so far from home, and under these circumstances. As unusual as it might seem, I am pretty sure, Mary was not the first new mom in Palestine to give birth in a space normally reserved for animals. That still happens today. Nor was she the first to lay her child on a pallet of straw. Both would have been rare in Jerusalem, but we are not in Jerusalem. This is how the other half lives, the half that the rest of the world has forgotten.

Things seem a bit out of place because this is not just another Palestinian child. This child is at one and the same time everything we are and everything God is. The way he comes into the world tells us a lot about who he is, who we are, and what it means to be those on whom his favor rests.

A REMARKABLE ANNOUNCEMENT (vv. 8-14)

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

1. Why do you suppose God chose to announce Jesus' birth to a handful of shepherds?
2. How would you describe the good news the angel delivers to the shepherds?
3. How does the angel describe Jesus?
4. How does the great company of angels describe the results of his coming into the world?
5. Isaiah told us he would be called "the Prince of Peace." How would you describe the peace he brings?
6. Who will experience his peace?
7. In what way are Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds the embodiment of those on whom God's favor rests?
8. How do we come to those on whom God's favor rests?

AN UNREMARKABLE MOMENT (vv. 15-16)

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

1. What did the shepherds find when they made their way to the manger?
2. Why do you suppose Luke devotes a lot of time a space describing the angelic announcement, and a fair amount of time and space describing what the shepherds did after leaving the manger, but very little time describing their moment at the manger?

A REASONABLE RESPONSE (vv. 17-20)

¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

1. How do the shepherds respond to what they have seen and heard?
2. How do those who hear the shepherd's message respond to what they have heard?
3. How does Mary respond to everything she is seeing and hearing?
4. What are some ways our response should mirror the responses of the shepherds, those who heard their message and Mary?
5. Which of these responses would you most like to recapture during this Christmas season and in the year to come?