



“Christmas at Luke’s House”

Fourth Sunday of Advent,

December 22, 2019

Luke 1:46-55, 67-79

Covenant Presbyterian Church Madison, WI

Rev. Charlie Berthoud

Today is the fourth Sunday of our Advent sermon series, Home for the Holidays, in which we’ve been looking at how each of the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) describes the birth of Jesus.

Our focus today is Luke, who has the longest narrative about Jesus’ birth, and is probably the most popular of the four.

From Luke, you’ve already heard the song of Mary, the mother of Jesus, known as the Magnificat, in which she praises God for acting with strength and mercy, especially for those who were too often forgotten or ignored.

Our second reading is another song, the song of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. Zechariah’s song is less familiar than Mary’s song but equally powerful.

The first half of the song is in praise of God, and in the second half Zechariah sings to his infant son, with inspiring words about Jesus.

Listen for God’s word.

⁶⁷ Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

⁶⁹ He has raised up a mighty savior for us
in the house of his servant David,

⁷⁰ as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

⁷¹ that we would be saved from our enemies

and from the hand of all who hate us.
⁷² Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,
⁷³ the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.
⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

It's almost Christmas, and we're going to Luke's house!

We've been to three other Christmas parties this month, and they've all been different.

At Mark's house, it was quiet, with no decorations, not even a baby. We met John the Baptist, who was wearing strange clothes and eating unusual food. He talked about repenting and preparing for a new reality—the Kingdom of God. He spoke of good news.

At Matthew's house, we met Mary and Joseph, who had just learned that she was pregnant. We learned about Joseph's righteousness. We also learned that the baby is going to be called Immanuel, which means “God is with us.”

At Matthew's house we also hear about King Herod, who probably didn't come to the party at Matthew's because he was afraid of this new baby. But the magi—the wise ones—come, bearing gifts for the new king.

Last Sunday we went to John's house, the place where I think the mystics and the poets like to go. At John's house we hear beautiful language about the

word made flesh to dwell among us, and we learn about the light that shines in the darkness.

There is no baby at John's house, but if we stay long enough, we learn that Jesus is the bread of life, the good shepherd, and the light of the world.

It's been a fun three weeks. But now here we are at Luke's house. What it's going to be like here?

Clearly there will be **music**. We've already heard the songs of Mary and of Zechariah, and there is one more song coming, from the angels.

And there will be a lot of **people**. Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah. We hear of Emperor Augustus and Governor Quirinius, but they may not make it to Luke's house. The shepherds make it, they are important to the story and the party. Lots of people at or near Luke's house.

In addition to music and people, there will be lots of **food**. In Luke's gospel, Jesus likes to eat, especially with the outcasts and the so-called sinners. Jesus tells stories about food, like the father who threw a party when his wayward son came home. After his resurrection he shares a meal with two disciples he met on the road to Emmaus.

So there will be music, people, and food at Luke's house—in abundance.

As wonderful as this sounds, we all know someone who won't enjoying being at Luke's house: the **Grinch**. He hated the songs, the food, and the people—at least he did until he changed.

This idealized vision of Christmas—full of music, food, and people—is something I hope we've all experienced, since it can be great. A big gather with lots of extended relatives. At least for a day or two.

However, the sad reality is that many people are hurting at Christmas, and their homes are not happy places.

Some of us are in families with excessive troubles. (Every family has troubles, some have a lot.)

Some of us are grieving.

And some of us are just plain lonely.



Did you hear about the woman in Oklahoma who posted on Craigslist that she was lonely and wanted to be with a family at Christmas, even offering to bring gifts?

It's a touching story but sadly, the woman received all sorts of negative reactions online, so she took down the post.

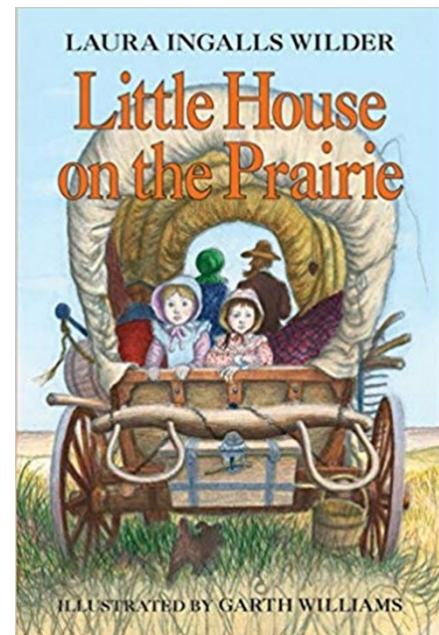
One young man was touched by it, and fortunately he took a screenshot of her post, and through Facebook, he eventually connected with her. His name is Carson, and he is lonely this year, because his mother died since last Christmas. I hope they have a wonderful Christmas together.

We're all looking for some sort of sense of home, of welcome, of love, especially at Christmas.

I read a new book this month: *Little House in the Big Woods* by Laura Ingalls Wilder. It's based in Wisconsin, and it's the first in the *Little House on the Prairie* series.

I never saw the TV show and had never read any of the books until this month. I was inspired by Diana Butler Bass, a contemporary theologian, who has a chapter called "HOME" in her delightful book called *GROUNDED: Finding God in The World*.

She loved the Little House series as a kid. And the series helped expand her idea of what "home" is. She writes:



Home [for Laura, in *Little House on the Prairie*] happened in numerous geographies, in a number of different dwellings, a constantly changing reality. Home consisted of some familiar treasures, an appreciation of place, and closely knit relationships between loved ones. Home meant working together with new neighbors, welcoming unexpected guests, and providing shelter for others on a journey. Home was as much a disposition as a building, the place of ultimate hospitality, where everyone was accepted, and a respite in grace.

I love the way she writes about new neighbors and unexpected guests.

That openness to people brings us to another song at Luke's house—the song of the angels in Luke 2. They sing about Good news of great joy for all the people.

All the people. Everyone.

Luke makes it abundantly clear in his gospel that the Good News is for everyone. We see it right in the beginning, in chapter 3, with a genealogy that goes from Jesus way back, not just to Abraham and Sarah, but all the way back to Adam and Eve.



Luke's House:

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.

Luke 2:11

At Luke's house everyone is welcome:

- Samaritans, sick people, rich people, poor people
- Locals, visitors, people of diverse backgrounds
- People who like white lights and those who like colored lights
- Vikings fans and Packers fans and even the people who don't like football
- The people who think impeachment is a sham and the people who think it's long overdue
- And even the people who didn't make it to church on the fourth Sunday of Advent, along with those of us who did

Luke makes it especially clear that God's love is meant for everyone. So Luke's house is crowded.

And Luke's house is probably not in the center of town, near the big houses or centers of power. It's a small and simple house, off the beaten path. It's not going to be on the cover of magazines or have all the fanciest recipes or latest decorations.

But it's a house filled with music, food, lots of people, and especially with love.

Now it's our turn to bring the celebration to our homes, our neighborhoods, our world. Amen.