

“I’ll be home for Christmas. You can count on me. Please have snow and mistletoe and presents under the tree.” Christmas is a family time, a time when families want to be home and together. Or at least that is how the movies and Christmas songs tell us it should be.

Did you realize that the first Christmas didn’t happen at home? Mary and Joseph were from Nazareth and had gone to Bethlehem to fulfill the requirements of the Roman census. Their first son, Jesus, was born in Bethlehem. So even the first Christmas family wasn’t home for Christmas. Tonight, as we begin our Wednesday Advent services, we are beginning a series on the “First Christmas Family” starting with Jesus.

Usually when a new baby is born, family comes to visit. If they live close enough, they come to the hospital where the baby is born. If they have to travel, they come to the house where the new baby lives as soon as possible. Jesus wasn’t born in a hospital. He didn’t spend his first night in a house. He was born in a barn. His first visitors were not family members. They were shepherds, men who left their sheep to go see the baby Jesus, the one the angel called “Christ the Lord.”

When Jesus was 40 days old, Mary and Joseph made the six mile journey from Bethlehem to the temple in Jerusalem to fulfill the requirements of the Jewish law. While they were there, an old man by the name of Simeon greeted Jesus and praised God saying, **“Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!”** (Luke 2:29-32)

Mary and Joseph returned to Bethlehem with the baby Jesus. Some time after that a group of “Wise Men” came knocking on the door of the house where they were staying. They came looking for the newborn king of the Jews, bowed down to worship him and presented Jesus with expensive and royal gifts. Then the wise men took a different path home.

It was a good thing they did, because after they left the nightmare began. Herod the Great was extremely jealous of any perceived threat to his throne. When the wise men didn’t return to tell him where he could find this newborn king, Herod sent his soldiers to Bethlehem to slaughter all of the baby boys 2 years old and younger.

Fortunately Mary and Joseph were warned about the danger to Jesus and escaped to Egypt. After Herod the Great died, Mary, Joseph and Jesus returned to Nazareth where Jesus grew up. He was the oldest child in the family, but not an only child. The Gospel of Matthew identifies four of Jesus’ brothers by name: James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (Matthew 13:55) and says that he had a number of sisters. Can you imagine growing up in a family with Jesus as your big brother?

There must have been some interesting family dynamics in that house hold. While he was growing up, Jesus learned the Carpentry trade from Joseph. But Jesus was more than a Carpenter.

After Jesus turned 30, he began traveling around Israel, preaching, teaching and healing. One question was asked over and over again, “Who is Jesus? The religious elite asked that question after Jesus healed a man who had been born crippled (Luke 5:21). Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great, asked the question after he ordered the execution of John the Baptist (Luke 9:7-9). Even Jesus disciples, his twelve closest friends, asked the question after Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35-41).

Who is Jesus? One thing is certain; he is not an ordinary man. He didn't have an ordinary beginning. Both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is both true God and true man. He is the Son of God who came into our world to be with us, to deliver us from the mess created by our sin. He is from the line of King David and was born to be the King who would rule over David's line forever. He was the son of the Virgin Mary who lived the perfect life we could never live and took our place under the law. Because He is true God He could pay the debt for our sins. He offered the perfect sacrifice on the cross. The debt was marked “Paid in Full” when He rose on Easter Sunday.

Who is Jesus? He is the most unique person who has ever lived. Everyone who encounters Him has to respond to Him one way or another. You just can't be neutral when it comes to Jesus. The people of Nazareth dismissed Jesus as a mere carpenter, the son of Mary and Joseph. The religious authorities of Israel were threatened by Jesus and called Him evil. Some today are openly opposed to Jesus. Other people are willing to respect Jesus as a great religious leader but not follow Him. Those who receive as the gift of God and believe that He is the Promised Savior, see Jesus as their Lord, the Messiah.

Jesus didn't enter our world to destroy it or dominate it. Jesus entered our world to enter into our hearts. Jesus became part of the first Christmas family to make us part of God's eternal family. Because of who Jesus is and all that He did, The Christmas family doesn't just consist of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. The Christmas family consists of Mary, Joseph, Jesus, you and me and all who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. So regardless where you are on December 25th this year, come home to Jesus this Christmas. He has a room ready and waiting for you. Amen.