

## **Twos The Morning After Christmas and The Manger Is Empty 2010**

I hope you had a wonderful Christmas day yesterday. I think someone wrote a poem about “Twos the day after Christmas and all through the house, piles of paper and boxes, rooms littered with trash...” The day after Christmas the lines begin to form in the mall with people returning their gifts. The day after Christmas, we all repent for just spending the day mindlessly eating. I asked last night, “How can sitting and eating all day long be this exhausting?”

The day after Christmas, we start wondering about how we are going to pay for all the gifts we purchased. But not to worry, for those who just didn’t get enough bargains, now we have sales starting at 5:00 am the day after Christmas. But I began to wonder about the day after that first Christmas in Bethlehem. We say that when Jesus came, everything changed. But what was really different the day after Christmas?

In Bethlehem, taxes still had to be paid. There was no holiday (they didn’t know it was Christmas so no one could start the twelve days of Christmas and no one had bothered to invent Kwanza yet). The financial burden and the political situation hadn’t changed. The Romans still ruled and Israel was still not truly free. People I’m sure were still griping and cursing about having to pay their taxes, the inconvenience of having to travel clear to Bethlehem to pay those taxes, having to stand in long lines, the impersonal treatment.

It was no doubt business as usual the day after Christ was born. There was still wickedness and evil, sin and terror. Murder and malice still reigned in the hearts of men and women and to the average citizen in Bethlehem their response no doubt would have been, “Another baby born? Big deal. Babies are born everyday here. Nothing special about a baby.”

The day after Jesus was born, wise men were still looking for him, they hadn’t found him as of yet. They were certain they wouldn’t go back to tell Herod. He was too weird and besides, God warned them in a dream not to report back to Herod.

The day after Jesus was born the shepherds were still tending to their sheep, but something had changed in them. They still looked and smelled like shepherds, but they were telling everyone who would listen what they had seen and heard the night before. “Angels...a baby... Messiah...a king.” But...who would believe a group of shepherds?

What happens after Christmas? Herod is angry and sets in motion plans to order the slaughter of all baby boys under the age of 2 and crying and weeping is heard throughout the land

as parents lose their infants to hell's desperate scheme.

Joseph, Mary and Jesus, having been warned in a dream, are about to become refugees in Egypt, remaining there as long as Herod is alive and searching for them.

The day after Christ's birth, Simeon and Anna are still waiting for the promise of God to be fulfilled, that they would not die until they had seen the Lord's Christ.

Mary is pondering all of yesterday's events in her heart, while busying herself caring for her little one. Nothing much has changed, and yet we know that everything has changed. What exactly has happened?

Let me share a couple of thoughts with you this morning and then I want to read you a story to illustrate how different things really are. **What had changed the day after Christmas?**

**1. God spoke to us. God was no longer silent.** There were 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testament. 400 years without a prophetic voice, and then God speaks again. The writer of Hebrews said, **"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son..."** **Hebrews 1:1-2.** God breaks the silence. Angels proclaim Salvation has come, Christ the Savior is born. People were still groping in darkness but with the birth of Jesus, the light of the world penetrated the darkness. **"The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. John 1:9** After all these years with no word of hope the silence and stillness is broken with the voice of God, and his voice sounded like the cry of a newborn infant. **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." John 1:14** The Word, spoken to us in love. God was no longer silent. What had changed the day after Christmas?

**2. God not only spoke to us, God acted in time, coming to us.** The Bible says, **"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons...and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."** **Galatians 4:4-5,7**

I love the fact that God acted in the fullness of time. I've made reference to this more than once during this Advent season. The fact that Caesar Augustus acted to order the whole world to be taxed. He acted, but God orchestrated in the fullness of time. Jim McGuiggan wrote, "Insist – and so we should – that people do what they want to do, that they have their shrewd schemes, flex their muscles, control the armies and hand out orders. Say all these things because

they're true; but say this also, that in and through all... God gets his way and as surely as Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God is the Lord of history."

God was no longer silent and God acted in time. The angels said a sign was given – a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. In the fullness of time, the sign had come, God's son, born of a woman, to redeem us so we could receive full rights as sons and daughters and heirs of God.

What changed? God came near to us. He came along side us. His voice penetrated the silence, the light of his life penetrated the darkness, Christ the Savior is born in the fullness of time. What had changed the day after Christmas?

**3. We are no longer alone!** It is one of the most profound realities of the Incarnation. **"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel – which means, 'God with us.'"** **Matthew 1:23** His name is Immanuel, God with us. And because God is with us, we are not alone anymore. I wish I could explain this in a way that would make a dramatic impact upon each of us. God is with us. Joseph and Mary knew it. The shepherds knew it. The wise men knew it. Simeon and Anna knew it. God had come down to us! God was revealing himself to us! Immanuel had come to us.

Some of you know the pain of loneliness. It is overwhelming to you at times, smothering at times. You've spoken to me about the effort it takes to make it through each day alone. May I tell you, even though you may be lonely this morning, you are not alone. His name is Immanuel. God has come to be with you. Christ the Savior is born and everything changed because he came and promised us he would never leave us and never forsake us. He is the wonderful counselor, the timeless companion who journeys with us. We are not alone. God is with us.

What changed the day after Christmas?

**4. We've been invited to the table!** To those of us who feel like we don't really count for much, to those of us who for much of our life have been overlooked, to those of us who are never chosen, to those of us who are invisible to so many, his birth signaled a different economy in God's kingdom. Mary sang, "God had regarded the lowly." **"He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant."** That's us. **"He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty."**

## **Luke 1:46-55**

I don't know if you understand, but some of us do. Some of us know what it's like to be overlooked, disregarded, shoved aside, passed over, worse than that, just flat out ignored! Invisible! But Jesus' birth announced a new economy. It wasn't the powerful, the wealthy, the proud that heard the announcement or that were invited to that stable, it was the lowly, the forgotten, the overlooked, the humble who were called to witness heaven's greatest miracle. Those who had no place at society's table were given seats at God's table of forgiveness and redemption and my how we hungry folks ate. The hungry were filled with good things! The lost were found. The dead were brought to life. Hope came to the hopeless.

Jesus came to save us from our sins and to restore the fellowship with the Father that had been broken. He came to make all things new and to bring us home to the Father. Relationship restored by his atoning sacrifice. God with us, to make us righteous and clean and new.

Things changed dramatically because of that first Christmas. God spoke, God acted, God came among us so we aren't alone, God had regard for us. But that isn't all. His coming into this world provides eternal life for us. His coming provides a way for us to go and be with him for eternity. What changed the day after Christmas?

**5. Death no longer holds us captive.** The writer of Hebrews declares, **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” Hebrews 2:14-15**

Because Jesus came, born of a virgin, and lived a holy life, and died as the sinless sacrifice for us and rose again, we have the hope of eternal life. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Because he lives, we don't fear death for we shall live also.

Several years ago I read a wonderful story written by Walter Wangerin. I want to read part of that story entitled *The Manger is Empty*.

Hear the good news. The manger is empty and so is the tomb. Jesus Christ is born and because he is born, we are no longer held captive by the fear of death. Jesus came and showed us how to live, but he also showed us how to cross from this life to the next. We're going to heaven because we are in Jesus and “can't no one snatch us out of his hand, no not ever.”

The manger is empty and so is the tomb. Jesus lived, died, arose, conquering life and death, hell and the grave and he shall reign forever and ever, kingdom without end. Hallelujah!