

“Imagine: Holding the Savior” (Christmas Eve)

(Luke 2:1-7, 19)

- **The Door of Humility**

- Imagine with me tonight... *going to Bethlehem*. Not back then, but *today*. You'll find it a lot more crowded than the small village it was when Jesus was born—over 30,000 people live there now. **(Picture - Bethlehem)** And *millions* visit every year. I'm guessing the traffic is *at least* as bad as Middletown! Imagine traveling down those busy streets to find a very special place: **(Picture - Church)** *the Church of the Nativity*. It's the oldest active church in the world—believers will still gather here to worship this Christmas. Because *1,700 years ago*, this church was built over the place *where Jesus is believed to have been born*. *Imagine getting to celebrate Christmas there!* As you entered in, you'd find something strange: *the door is only 4 feet tall, 2 feet wide*. **(Picture - Door)** That's a tiny door! (Even my wife, who's 5 ft. 1, would have to crouch down to enter!) Historically, they did this to protect from invaders—but today it has taken on a symbolic purpose: they call it, *“The Door of Humility.”* So, get this: to visit the place of Jesus' birth, *you have to enter through the door of humility*. If that's not sacred poetry, I don't know what is! No matter who you are, how tall you stand, how important you think you are—*everyone* who wants to come behold the birth of this King has to bend down and enter through the *door of humility*. The angels sang. The shepherds bowed down. The Wisemen bowed down. And so do we. *So. Do. We.*
- The Apostle Paul, who violently opposed the Gospel, eventually walked through the door of humility, bent his knee and became the

greatest missionary of all time. He wrote in Philippians 2: **“Christ Jesus: who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** (Phil. 2:5-11)

- 300 years later, Augustine, who once resisted Jesus, eventually bowed down to walk through that door, and became one of the greatest Christian thinkers. He prayed: **“O Lord, our God, Maker of all things, who became small for our sake: You who clothe the heavens were wrapped in swaddling cloths; You who rule the stars lay in a manger. Grant that as we marvel at your humility, we may be raised by your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”** (Augustine)
- We bow down because, no matter how low we go, *He went so much lower* for us, for our salvation. We remember, we adore Him, again and again, because there’s no greater love than *this*. There’s no greater glory than the One who *left* eternal glory, to enter the dust, in order to *lift us back up* to His glory. Here is the Savior, here is the Lord, here is our God. *This is Christmas.*
- **Clashing Kingdoms**

- During Advent at Connection, we've been walking through the Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke. And tonight we come to the part where Luke describes the birth of Christ: **"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."** (Lk. 2:1-7)
 - Isn't it interesting that the story of Christ's birth begins by naming the most powerful man alive at the time: *Caesar Augustus*. He was the first *emperor* of Rome, by many accounts, the greatest.
 - He exercised his authority by decreeing a *census*, which is really about *taxes* and *military*—money and power. His power depended on the amount of people and cash in his domain—which was *vast*. Do you know what they called Caesar Augustus back then, before anyone knew about Jesus? He was sometimes referred to as *son of god*, because his father, Julius Caesar, was *deified* by the Roman Senate after his death—and Augustus would later be worshipped as well. He was also called *savior*, and the celebration of his birthday was referred to as *good news* ("gospel"), because through him Rome entered its "golden era" and brought so-called "peace," the *Pax Romana*, to the

world—even though *much blood* was spilled to enforce that peace. Ironically, it was *this Roman Emperor's* decree which helped fulfill the Hebrew prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. And this poor, unknown child, lying in a *feeding trough* (that's what a manger is), was the One the angel Gabriel said would be called the true "*Son of God,*" because he was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit, and he would be the ruler of a Kingdom *that lasts forever.* Compare the *might* of Caesar with this divine child. For the next 30 years, Jesus would live in obscurity. And even when He began His public ministry, He only ever traveled by foot within the confines of an area no bigger than *New Jersey.*

- But somehow, here we are today: the name *Caesar Augustus* has faded into history. His kingdom ended long ago. But *Jesus?* This humble King, laid in a manger? 2,000 years from His birth, more people around the world worship Him today than ever, *more every day.* His Kingdom continues to advance, because it is not of this world. How do you explain this inconceivable turn of history, unless He really is who He said He is? *Savior. Lord. Son of God.*

- **Search No More**

- Christmas can be a *crazy* time for us. Holidays can be exciting, joyful, fun—they can also be stressful, overwhelming, depressing. We have complicated it to no end, but Christmas is meant to be a time to *reset* our lives. A time to recenter our lives on the One who saves us from sin and death. A time that fills us with renewed *hope, peace, joy, and love.* Is that what this season has been for you? Or is it hard to enter in that door?

- It's not too late to prepare for Christmas. If you want to know the best way to celebrate, look no further than Mary. Look at how she "celebrated" the first Christmas: after angelic visitors, prophecies fulfilled, shepherds with tales of glory—you know what Mary did? **"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." (Luke 2:19)** She took it all in, captured the memories and hid them safe in her heart, and she considered it all—what it might mean, what God was doing. *She treasured all these things about Christ and pondered them in her heart.* That's Christmas.
- Things are stirring in our world. If you google "the quiet revival" you'll find that recent data suggests a surprising new trend in Western culture: more young people among Gen Z and Millennials are coming to church after decades of decline—and supposedly more of them will be in church this Christmas Eve than ever. Something is shifting. There's a widespread spiritual hunger—for community, authenticity, truth—for God. You might be here because this is home, and you've heard this story *a thousand times*. You might have come out of duty, with your family or friend. Or you might have possibly come because your one of those who's *searching*. *You're being drawn*, and you're not even sure why. Whoever you, whether for the first time, or you've come through that door a thousand times: *if you're searching for God this Christmas, look no further*. He has come to us, to our world. He's not what you'd expect. *He's infinitely better*.
- Sometimes we run around searching for something *that's not actually lost*. The other night, I pulled in the driveway and found my wife and kids running around the yard, looking for our dog Ruby. They left the garage door open and thought she ran off. *"Ruby, where are you,*

Ruby, come!” You know what we discovered? She was inside the whole time—just chilling in the basement. You know what that’s like: you look for your keys, and they’re in your hand, or your glasses, that are on your head. Lots of people are *searching for God*, one way or another—searching for something to save them, something that satisfies, searching for a reason, a purpose, a better way to live.

- But **Christmas simply means this: you don’t have to search anymore—He’s already come.** He promised He would, and He did. He’s still showing up in unexpected ways and places, to unexpected people, today! *And* He promised that one day, He’s coming back again. **Look no further than Jesus—God is here.** This is Christmas. And if you’ve never walked through that door and bowed down to Him, or if you’ve drifted away—I would love to invite you *tonight* to come back, and bow down, and give Him your life. God is right here: He’s done all the hard work, paid the highest cost, come to us, to make it easy for us to come to Him. But you have to be willing to walk through that door. **All He asks of you is to trust Him, put your faith in Him—and in Him you will find everything you need. Imagine if that’s what this Christmas was about for you, for me.** *If you want that, pray with me now.*