

**Advent Series:** Not a Silent Night

**Sermon #5:** “Not a Silent Night”

**Scripture:** Luke 2:1-7 (to be read during the sermon)

**Source:** Rev. Adam Hamilton at the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, MO

<http://www.cor.org/worship/sermon-archives/show/sermons/Candle-Light-Christmas-Eve/>

## **Opening Video Clip**

**PP#1:** Not a Silent Night ~ Christmas Through the Eyes of Mary

“Not a Silent Night”

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” -John 3:16

Christmas through the eyes of Mary. “Not a Silent Night” John 3:16, say it with me, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

**PP#2:** *Image of Mary cradling the baby Jesus with wonder on her face.*

The Christmas event has happened. The baby has been born. But what does it mean? What does Christmas mean? We’ve been trying to look at Christmas through Mary’s eyes, because she had a unique perspective, a front-and-center role that no one else had. So, we’ve been asking what Christmas meant for Mary, so that we can discover what Christmas means for us.

**PP#3:** *Image for Silent Night*

This past Wednesday, we gathered here late at night. At midnight, the traditional time when Jesus was born, we lit the Christmas candle. We all got up, formed a circle, each with our own candles, and we passed the light of Jesus around the room. Then, standing with all our candles burning, we sang “Silent Night. Holy Night. All is calm. All is bright.”

This carol was written in 1816 by a Roman Catholic priest in Austria. He had the music director from the local school compose the tune, who wrote it for guitar. And they sang and played it, for the first time, during their Christmas Eve service.

This writer and composer painted a song-picture. What was it like that first Christmas? They painted a soft scene, idyllic, serene, perfect. “All is calm, all is bright.” Ah, so peaceful.

Others have painted pictures, too, in their carols. “Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head. The stars in the bright sky looked down where He lay, The little lord Jesus asleep on the hay. The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes.” We have this picture of what Christmas is supposed to be.

**PP#4:** *A scene of chaotic, crazy and frantic Christmas*

But tell me, how many of your Christmases were like that? Did you have quiet, perfect Christmases? My guess is that you didn’t. We have this picture of what Christmas is supposed to be like, but then the reality is that our Christmases are filled with noise, and frantic running around, and hectic schedules, and last minute wrapping and cooking, and plans going awry, and being with people we wouldn’t otherwise choose to be around. Our Christmases are messy, stressful, chaotic.

And we measure our reality against the way we think it is supposed to be, and we feel like something is very wrong. Two-thirds of women, this was measured three years ago, two-thirds of women in America report to feeling depressed over the Christmas holiday.

**PP#5:** *Image for a person/people feeling something is missing/wrong with their lives.*

We do the same with the rest of our lives. We constantly compare our realities of stress, and chaos, and things going wrong, and all the ways that we fail, with the idyllic image of how we think things ought to be. It should be so much better, and more perfect. Why is it like the way it is? We feel like something is very wrong. And so we get frustrated, even depressed, with our lives.

But was it really a silent night? We've been discovering, looking through Mary's eyes, that it was far from it! When we look at it a bit closer, the nostalgic images of that first Christmas quickly fade away, and the mess of reality comes through.

**PP#6:** *Image of a very pregnant Mary, in pain, riding on a donkey.*

Imagine being 9 months pregnant, and told you have to walk 90 miles to a strange place, with no one you knew around. At best, ride on a donkey for 4 days! But the Bible doesn't mention a donkey. That's put in by kind artists! Mary knew she would be having her baby in a place she had never been before. They had no reservations. They were in a strange place with no family around. Who would serve as a midwife she could trust? What if the baby came along the way? No painkillers! Having a baby was very dangerous for women at home. And this is how she was going to have her baby?

**PP#7:** *Image of a plain maternity ward hospital room.*

You know, that's far different from what we are used to. Today, we have come to expect only the best for our birth experiences. We want it to be very clean, safe, and perfect.

You know, when I was born, it was in a regular hospital room. When my kids were born, there was a special wing, a maternity ward, with some nice perks like a private room, a chair for the dad to sleep in, and a gift certificate from the local hotel for a free overnight stay. We were impressed. But you know, it's come a long way even in the past dozen years. Hospitals are in vicious competition to attract expectant mothers to use their facility.

**PP#8:** *Advertisement by a hospital to attract expectant mothers, offering all kinds of perks.*

I went surfing to see what area hospitals were offering to attract potential mothers. Birthing suits, birthing tubs, lounges for extended family members, free wi-fi, free meals for dad, postnatal body therapy, free baby portraits.

Then, in a different metro area not too far away, I found the winner. This is from their website. "Each room feels far more like a resort spa than a hospital room. Relax in the whirl pool tub. Stretch out in the queen size bed, for your partner to share, if you wish. Admire your newborn sleeping nearby in the in-room crib. Enjoy the attention of nurses who pamper the entire family. Pop your favorite CD in the entertainment center. And indulge in our fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies." Dang! I'm thinking, I want to have a baby!

Luke describes Mary's delivery experience. Compare it to what this hospital is offering.

**PP#9-10: Luke 2:1-7**

“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.

**Reader: Luke 2:1-7**

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**PP#11: *Image of newborn Jesus swaddled in a rudimentary manger.***

Mary’s delivery room experience? “She wrapped him in strips of cloth and placed him in a manger, because there was not room for them in the inn.”

Notice, it doesn’t even say stable. It could have been the livery behind the inn, where travelers kept the animals they traveled on. That would mean no barn animals, no sheep, no cows. It could have been the first century equivalent to a parking garage! Do you see the song-pictures the carol writers have painted?

It was not a silent night.

Just ask anyone who gave birth naturally. It was not silent!

Actually, let’s do that. Let’s ask those here who have given birth naturally to briefly describe their experience. In groups with others near you, find a woman who has given birth naturally.

**PP#12: Women who have given birth naturally:**

1. What does it feel like to give birth?
2. What were some of the noises during the birth process?

Ask them about their experience. Ask them these two questions: 1) What does it feel like to give birth? And 2) What were some of the noises during the birth process. Turn to one of those brave women near you, and ask them about their delivery experience. I’ll give you two minutes.

*[Pause for 2 minutes.]*

Having a baby is not silent! Mary was miserable!

**PP#13:** *Image for Life is hard!*

Ok, time for the take home application: if this was how it was with Mary, the most blessed of all women, carrying God's Son, born in an event that changes all of history like no other event, why would you think that your life is going to be any easier?

Life is hard sometimes, and doesn't go as planned! Good and bad come together. Life works like this for everyone. Isaiah 9:2 admits that people walk in darkness, people live in a land of deep darkness.

But the Christmas message is, that in the moment of pain and despair, God was doing the greatest thing in Mary's life. God works in the adversity, pain.

This is the Christmas message! If life were perfect, there would be no need for a Savior! The Christmas message is that although life is full of pain and failure, there is a God who cares enough to come and do something about it.

**PP#14:** Isaiah 9:2 "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."

John 1:5 "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

The Christmas message is that "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light, on those living in the land of darkness a light has dawned." John 1:5 says about Christmas, "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

This is why Christmas is December 25. It's not because it is Jesus' actual birthday. We don't know when He was born. The church chose this date to celebrate it because it demonstrated in the physical world what was happening spiritually! It's the winter solstice...darkest time of the year. But from now on, the darkness is receding. This speaks to what Jesus did!

**PP#15:** *An image representing how Jesus' birth changed everything.*

Mary knew that her baby would change everything. But He didn't bring an end to her pain or troubles. Actually, He caused a lot more! Jesus doesn't come and take all of your cares away. He doesn't make everything easy and perfect. He doesn't pay my bills, give me all the presents I want, protect me from danger and harm. Christians follow Jesus because we believe that in His life, teachings, death and resurrection, He shows us the truth, He shows us what it means to be authentically human, He shows us who God really is.

The gifts that Jesus gives us don't come under a tree. They usually aren't what we want to make today easier. His gifts are much deeper. His gifts restore us to our identity as humans, as God's children. And then, with God, we can face our days, with all their problems and pain, with a hope that sustains us, carries us, through it all.

So, let's take a brief look at the four presents that we all received at Christmas, when we received the Jesus of Christmas into our lives. We didn't find them under the tree. We found them in our hearts; they came when we invited Jesus there.

**PP#16:** Not a silent night: 4 Gifts We Receive at Christmas

1. A new way

"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" -John 14:6

Jesus came as “the way the truth and the life.” Christians, right from the beginning, were known as followers of “the way,” a radically different way of living. The angels proclaimed, “to you this day, in the city of David, a Savior is born, who is Christ the Lord.”

As Lord, Jesus directs our way of life. We pledge to follow His way.

The world promotes self indulgence. Jesus’ way promotes self denial.

The world tells us to promote our own glory. Jesus’ way tells us to promote God’s glory.

The world tells us greatness comes in others focused on us. Jesus tells us greatness is focusing on others.

The world tell us to accumulate riches. Jesus’ way tells us that our riches do not consist in our possessions.

The world tells us to demand justice. Jesus’ way tells us to demonstrate mercy.

The world tells us to be served. Jesus tells us to serve, and when we do, we are blessed.

This is true, and we all can relate. We feel the inner joy when we help, when we serve, when we do good for others. It releases God’s joy inside. Ask anyone who’s been on a mission trip. Yes, we did good. But the true blessing came in what it did for us. We found that we were the ones blessed!

I follow Jesus because I want to live a different way, His way.

**PP#17:** Not a silent night: 4 Gifts We Receive at Christmas

1. A new way

2. God’s love

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” -John 3:16

Second gift: God’s love placed into our hearts. God sent Jesus, His only Son, because of God’s great love for us. Christmas is about God’s love. God is the first present giver! I learned more about God’s love when I became a parent than I ever did in seminary. The story of the Prodigal Son became real to me. I would do that for my son! I would willingly lay down my life for my child. I wouldn’t even need to think about it. I love my kids. It’s not a matter of my head. It’s my heart.

God loves like this. I follow Jesus because in Him I see the love of God!

**PP#18:** Not a silent night: 4 Gifts We Receive at Christmas

1. A new way

2. God’s love

3. Mercy

““She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.”” -Matthew 1:21

Third gift: mercy, forgiveness. The angel told Joseph to give the baby the name Jesus. In Hebrew, it is Ya-SHOO-a. It means “God saves.” “You are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.”

I know that I need saving. When I am honest with myself about myself, I know that I cannot cut it, no matter how hard I try. There is a darkness within me that I cannot fix on my own. I need to be saved from my sins. I follow Jesus because I need, I want, God’s mercy.

**PP#19: Not a silent night: 4 Gifts We Receive at Christmas**

1. A new way
2. God's love
3. Mercy
4. Hope

“The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” -John 1:5

And the fourth gift we receive at Christmas is hope, in the darkest of places!

One of my pastor friends, he's a District Superintendent now, once preached that the only God he will serve is one who walks with him into the emergency room. His daughter suffered a terrible accident. And as he paced the emergency room back and forth, wondering if she were going to live or die, he clung to God. He said, your God isn't real unless He goes with you into the emergency room. He needed a God who could bring light into his darkness. He needed a God who, when the worst happens in this life, promises that there is something more. He needed his little girl to be either physically healed, or to be taken to someplace glorious. Pastor Mark's God was there with him.

I follow Jesus because He is the only one who pierces my darkness with light.

Mary, that first Christmas, amid all the noise, and pain, and darkness, experienced a miracle. She did experience a silent night. As she held her baby, and gazed into His tiny face, all the mess, all the pain, all the chaos, faded away. She received what really mattered. In her heart, a peaceful silence took over. All was calm. All was bright. Her life was changed. She was still next to a manger in a strange place. There were still all kinds of pain and troubles in her future. But that night she received all that God gave at Christmas: a new way, God's love, mercy, hope.

**PP#20: Christmas is for you!**

It's for you, too. Don't miss out on Christmas. There's still time.

In your noise, in your darkness, in your pain, Jesus is born.

Let's pray. And as we do, if you want to have this for your life, if you want to say “yes” to Jesus, and to all that Jesus brings into your heart, you can just pray this prayer along with me. Say it quietly under your breath.

Let's pray...

“Yes, Jesus, I trust you with my life. I want to follow you. I accept your love for me. Forgive me, I pray. Help me to trust in your hope, and honor you in all that I do. In your holy name. Amen.”