

"Christmas in Our Clutter"

Christmas Eve
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton

7:00 p.m. Friday, December 24, 2010
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-20

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

His wife decided their home needed a nativity set—a Christmas decoration that consisted of a stable and farm animals, shepherds and angels, Mary and Joseph, and the Christ Child in the manger. So pastor and author Philip Gulley went on a mission to find a nativity set.

The rural area in which they lived didn't have a Wal-Mart or shopping mall, but there was Wilson's Variety Store. Gulley thought he'd check there for a nativity set. After all, the owner, Wilson Roberts, had a motto: "We have it, if we can find it." It was, to put it mildly, a cluttered store. It was a store filled to the brim with 40 years' worth of merchandise. Gulley writes that such clutter made for an interesting contrast of items on the same shelf. For instance, a poster of Michael Jackson sat next to a 1959 edition of *The Old Farmer's Almanac*. Wilson would probably just say there was something for everyone.

And I suppose everyone has a place in their lives where clutter resides. Do you have a drawer or closet in your home that is the catch-all for things? Most people do. My home, while quite neat and tidy most of the time, still has those places where clutter just...clutters. The top drawer of our antique washstand is one such place. I'll take up Wilson's motto as my own: "We have it, if we can find it." From duct tape to postage stamps, from a roll of twine to a stapler to extra hooks for Christmas ornaments, whatever it is, it is probably in that drawer—I think. Because with all the clutter, it's kind of hard to be sure.

That is, perhaps, the biggest problem with clutter. It can be difficult to wade through at times. A Fibber McGee closet wouldn't be so bad, as long as you didn't have to open it and have everything fall down on top of you. The trouble is our **lives** are often cluttered, and just moving through them—well, it's as if the clutter threatens to come a-tumblin' down on us.

We are such busy people, each hour of the day filled with stuff to do. We are such distracted people, claiming to multi-task, when in reality we merely flit from one thing to another without giving our full attention to anything. We are such fretful people—worried about the future and ruminating about the past so that we forget how to live in the present.

How are we supposed to find a nativity set in all that? How are we supposed to trust God is really and truly with us when we're not sure where to find him? How are we supposed to experience peace on earth and the favor God intends for his people when we're inundated with the clutter of our lives?

Wilson, the storeowner, hunted through the variety of stuff in his variety store for the nativity set. He looked near the bobby pins and hairnets, the garden hoses and lawn chairs. The last place he looked was underneath the candy display, which is exactly where the nativity set was. It was a cheaply made set, and obviously had been through the wringer—the cow only had one ear by the time Wilson found it. But otherwise the set was intact. Gulley reflected on Wilson’s search and wrote, “Sometimes our search for the Divine has us poking around in all kinds of corners.”

Consider the corner that was Bethlehem, and those simple shepherds on the nearby hills on this eve so long ago. While everyone else in town is sleeping the night away, they are working the midnight shift under the stars, tending their sheep. They herd the sheep into close and safe groups, watch out into the darkness for the glint in the eyes of predators, try not to fall asleep in the quiet. To do their job well, they keep busy.

Then an angel of the Lord brings them the surprising good news that a Savior has been born, that the Messiah, the Lord, has come. The sign of this is a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. Yeah, but just try to locate that sign in some corner of a town now triple the population because of a royal census. Just try to find that manger amidst the clutter of houses and stables. Just try to find the living Lord in the dead of night in Bethlehem.

Yet search and hunt they do, and hurriedly so in their excitement, until they find Mary and Joseph and the child. Their words come out, all cluttered and jumbled on top of each other, as they make known what the angel had told them. And they return to the fields and their sheep, praising God until the dawn’s light brings a new day.

I suppose we could say the shepherds found the Christ child amidst the clutter. Or maybe it’s the other way around—that the Christ found them. The point is, He has come. He is here, in the midst of the clutter of our lives, in the midst of our distress and our distractions. He has come to dwell with us—a divine gift of peace for hurried lives and fretful minds.

Gulley says that each year at Christmas he places the nativity set on the piano next to their front door. He writes, “That way, when we’re scurrying about in a frenzy, honoring the birth of the One who told us not to be anxious about anything, we can pause and remember what Christmas is all about. How that quiet baby came into this tumultuous world, greeted by wide-eyed shepherds and one-eared cows.”

Dear friends: If you came here tonight, hoping to find Christ, take heart. For our Lord, in all his perfect love, has found you. **AMEN.**

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