The Third Wednesday in Advent
Rolling Meadows, Illinois
December 15, 1971

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 2: 7: AND SHE GAVE VIRTH TO HER FIRSTBORN SON AND WRAPPED HIM IN SWADDLING CLOTHS, AND LAID HIM IN A MANGER, BECAUSE THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR THEM IN THE INN.

The TITLE for these ADVENT SERVICES has been THE MYSTERY AND THE MIRACLE OF THE MANGEI

Two weeks ago we TALKED about the MYSTERY and the MIRACLE of MARY - and Mary's FAITH - that she ACTUALLY BELIEVED the WORDS of the ANGEL GABRIEL. Last week we TALKED about the MYSTERY and the MIRACLE of JOSEPH - and Joseph's FAITH - that he ACTUALLY TOOK MARY to be his wife and BELIEVED that she had become PREGNANT by the HOLY SPIRIT. Tongiht I should like to talk about the MYSTERY and the MIRACLE of the ~~CHRIST~~-CHILD IN THE MANGER

- (God should become flesh & dwell among us.)

It is really a MYSTERY and a MIRACLE that the CHILD LIVED. Luther says somewhere that it is only because of GOD'S ABSOLUTE PROVIDENCE & PLAN and WILL that the BABY JESUS EVER ~~LIVED~~ survived. Luther says it was a miracle that ~~He wonders why~~ He DID NOT FREEZE to death. Certainly the CONDITIONS in the BARN were NOT very SANITARY. Mary did NOT have her Baby in one of OUR MODERN HOSPITALS.

And I sometimes wonder if perhaps we do not UNDULY GLAMORIZE the WHOLE CHRISTMAS SCENE. Certainly all the CHRISTMAS CARDS & decorations tend to DO THAT. Everybody is STANDING around with some kind of UNEARTHLY, HEAVENLY GLOW, and HALOS are hanging around their HEADS - indicating of course, that they are SPECIALLY CHOSEN and almost SEMI-DIVINE BEINGS. And the LITTLE BABY lies there very CONFORTABLY in a BED of STRAW - again, with a HALO around HIS HEAD. And the SHEPHERDS are BOWING ~~in the BACKGROUND~~ before the MYSTERY - - - and in the BACKGROUND, one beholds the MEN from the EAST coming on their hump backed camels. And everybody is QUIET. Everybody is ADORING - and everybody is BEHAVING PRECISELY as OUR imagination thinks HE SHOULD. ~~And ACTUALLY what we are doing is OVER GLAMORIZING the SCENE.~~ It was not like THAT at all.

Maybe CHILDREN have somehow CAPTURED the HUMANENESS of it all - the UNDIVINELIKE quality of it all - the UNGLAMOROUS and UNGLORIFIED ASPECT of it all. Let me READ to you a few STATEMENTS from CHILDREN who wrote about the CHRISTMAS MIRACLE. This is how THEY view the MYSTERY and the MIRACLE of the MANGER. "The COWS were mooing, the SHEEP were making their NOISE, the HORSES were making their NOISE, and the DOGS and the CATS. And JESUS didn't pay ANY ATTENTION to the NOISE - He just went on SLEEPING."....."Mary sang LULLABYS - and Joseph tried to keep the ANIMALS QUIET by FEEDING THEM - and finally they GOT QUIET by SLEEPING."....."There was a BEAUTIFUL COLOR in the STREETS - and LIGHTS ALL OVER the PLACE WHERE JESUS was BORN. The BLUE SKY was covered with STARS It was very BRIGHT and BEAUTIFUL."....."The ANGELS WERE SINGING SOFTLY - not SCREAMING LOUD like OPERA. A beautiful light was SHINING SIDEWARDS on HIS HEAD where He was SLEEPING - BRIGHTER than the MOON - but NOT TOO BRIGHT, because you could still SEE JESUS."....."Everybody thought Jesus would be like a KING who would say, 'TAKE THIS MAN TO THE DUNGEON. Let this man be BEHEADED,' and stuff like that.' But the people were WRONG. Jesus was only a BABY with BROWN HAIR, BLUE EYES, WHITE SKIN, and was dressed in a BLANKET. He wore 'SWADDLING CLOTHS' which means RAGGED. He slept in a MANGER - which is sort of like a STAND with a BUCKET in it. It's NOT as big as a BASSINET. Today, if you put a BABY on HAY, it would GET a RASH. Jesus had NO BABY POWDER - it wasn't invented yet."....."They gave Jesus MILK and STEAK and SOFT CANDY because His GUMS weren't very STRONG YET - [He didn't have any TEETH] and a SOFT SUCKER [red]. STEAK was JESUS' FAVORITE FOOD. Joseph liked HAMBURGER and MARY liked COLD VEGETABLES. The STABLE SMELLED like HAY and AMINAL SKIN. It wasn't a PLEASANT SMELL, but they liked it because they HAD JESUS - and it was GOOD to have a CHILD. Jesus smelled CLEAN, and like a ROSE, and like a CHRISTIAN."

Well, it probably wasn't THAT WAY EITHER. But I think the point is that THESE YOUNGSTERS may have CAUGHT more of the DEEPLY HUMAN quality of the CHRISTMAS SCENE than our

OVER-GLAMORIZED Christmas Cards have.

So they WRAPPED HIM in SWADDLING CLOTHS and LAID HIM in a MANGER. In a sense, I suppose, these swaddling cloths were GRIM REMINDERS of THINGS to COME. For this BABY, of all babies, was BORN for ONE EXPRESSED PURPOSE and REASON - - and that was to DIE. All other men - while they are born MORTAL and from the FIRST BREATH on are CANDIDATES for the COFFIN - like to think that they are BORN TO LIVE. But THIS BABY was born EXPRESSLY to DIE. He was SENT by GOD in order that He might BEGIN ALREADY at this point in HIS LIFE to WALK that LONG and SUFFERING ROAD to the CRUEL TREE of CALVARY. He was destined to LAY DOWN HIS LIFE - and then to BURST the BONDS of DEATH by His EASTER TRIUMPH over the TOMB - - - that ALL MEN might be REDEEMED and RECONCILED to GOD. So you might say the "SWADDLING CLOTHS" with which Mary WRAPPED her NEWBORN BABY were GRIM HERALDS of the GRAVE CLOTHES that some 33 years later would be wrapped around THIS SON of HERS - as they BORE HIS LIFELESS BODY down into the FLICKERING TORCHLIGHT of JOSEPH'S GARDEN TOMB.

You might say that there are some COMTEMPORARY SWADDLING CLOTHS with which the Lord Jesus is WRAPPED TODAY. Jesus TODAY is WRAPPED in such things as BREAD and WINE at the ALTAR... .....He Is WRAPPED in the BROTHER at our SIDE - and sometimes it is TERRIBLY DIFFICULT to RECOGNIZE him there, to LOVE him there - - - because so MANY ~~BROTHERS~~ People are TERRIBLY UN-LOVEABLE. In fact, they are DOWN RIGHT MEAN and CRUEL and MALICIOUS and very UNCHRIST-LIKE.....The LORD JESUS is WRAPPED UP in the WATER of HOLY BAPTISM and in the WORD that gets SOUNDED into the EARS of PEOPLE day in and day out.

And now we are told that they had to have THIS BABY out there in the BARN "BECAUSE THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR THEM IN THE INN." The INN APPARENTLY was CROWDED and FILLED with PEOPLE. And I think that we would have to ACKNOWLEDGE that MOST of the PEOPLE in the INN were probably VERY GOOD PEOPLE. They were NOT necessarily WILD and WICKED and EVIL PEOPLE.

And isn't it TRUE in OUR LIVES TOO? Jesus Christ often GETS CROWDED out of our LIVES - Not because of a LOT of BAD THINGS - but because of a LOT of GOOD THINGS. HE is NOT necessarily CROWDED OUT because we are FILLED with ALL KINDS of EVIL THOUGHTS and EVIL PLANS and EVIL INTENTIONS. NO, it is very often that our LIFE is SIMPLY OVER-CROWDED with a LOT of GOOD THINGS. But there simply isn't ANY ROOM for HIM - or, at least, we relagate Him to the SUBURBS of our EXISTANCE - - - just so that He stays CLOSE ENOUGH so we can CALL on HIM when WE NEED HIM.

The PROBLEM here at BETHEHEM WAS OBVIOUSLY that NOBODY RECOGNIZED God COME DOWN to EARTH in the BABY JESUS. And again, this is OUR PROBLEM TOO. We fail to RECOGNIZE Jesus when He comes TO US INCOGNITO in PEOPLE a[redacted] - and as we OBSERVED BEFORE, especially people who we quite NATURALLY TURN OFF because they are so UNLOVE-ABLE ~~and so MEAN and CRUEL and MALICIOUS and so UNCHRISTLIKE~~. Probably in THOSE PEOPLE Jesus comes to us with the GREATEST CHALLENGE - - because it is always EASY to LOVE the CHRIST who COMES to us in a LOVEABLE PERSON. The REAL CHALLENGE is to bestow LOVE, and AFFECTION, and COMPASSION, and UNDERSTANDING on the CHRIST who COMES TO US in the UNCHRISTLIKE LOOKING PERSON.

And that, I think, is the GREAT MYSTERY and MIRACLE of the MANGER - that the CHRIST CHILD came to LOVE ALL, to DIE for ALL, and to RISE AGAIN from the DEAD for ALL. And it is also the GREAT MYSTERY and MIRACLE in OUR LIFE when we can LOVE EVERYONE in HIS NAME. Amen.