

## Christmas Needs Room: *Christmas Eve Sermon*

Norwalk Christian Church, December 24, 2019, Year A, Christmas Eve

---

It was a moment of Christmas Magic. I was seven, and it was a mid-December evening. And it changed my life. Perhaps it had the same effect on you, too, wherever you were that magical night. I'm speaking of course of that great moment in cinematic history. December 16, 1987, when an hour-long special on ABC debuted, arguably the greatest Christmas movie ever made. *A Muppet Family Christmas*.

You remember it, I know. All three Muppet Universes--Sesame Street, Fraggle Rock, and The Muppets--together for the first time ever--celebrating Christmas under Fozzy Bear's Mother's Roof.

I'm confused by your blank stares. You don't know this critically-acclaimed film? Well, it's a good thing you showed up tonight. I almost want to dismiss you now so you can go see it. Because it is, truly, beautiful.

The songs. The chaos. World's colliding. Kermit and Ernie, Grover and Fozzie Bear, Gimbly and Gonzo, Animal and Cookie Monster. The Swedish Chef, chasing Big Bird, believing he found the Christmas Turkey. And, of course, a two-headed monster dressed like Santa, with more and more Muppet guests showing up every minute, filling up every last square-inch of the house.

Towards the end of this masterpiece, Fozzy Bear gets everyone's attention:

"Hey, everybody, quiet. My mother has an announcement."

"Thank you, Fozzie," she says (and she looks just like Fozzie, but with a wig). "I'd like to welcome you all here. You are *all* here, aren't you?"

"I think so, yeah," the crowd replies.

"Good," she continues, "because I'm afraid we're running out of room. Two of you will have to sleep hung on hangers on a hook on the wall.

Cut to Gonzo and Animal, hanging on hangers, as Gonzo says, "What a fabulous idea!" And Animal screams, "Love hanger, love hanger!"

"See, Mom," Fozzy Says. "I told you it would be easy."

"They are weirdos, Fozzie...but they're nice weirdos."

And then, they do what Muppets do best, they come together in an old-fashioned, Muppet Family Christmas sing-a-long. It is a *mess*. But it's a beautiful mess.

---

We are certainly crowded tonight, and you may be weirdos, but at least you're nice. And what better setting to engage the Christmas Story again. If all we had to go on were Christmas cards, carols, and the traditional Nativity Scene, then perhaps we could believe that Christmas is always so calm and bright. But the story is a mess. Worlds collide, and there's really not a better word to describe the Gospel cast than "weirdos."

Did you not hear the story? It's crowded with strangers and scandal, questions and doubts. Old Joseph and young Mary, still engaged and not yet married, yet having a baby. Angels interrupting dreams, heavenly visitors appearing to down-to-earth shepherds. The friendly beasts, as our youth sang about earlier. An outdoor birth. Wise men from the east, who had no business even knowing about this moment in Jewish history, yet there they were, drawn by the light.

And this baby--the one who brings these worlds together, perhaps the greatest weirdo of all, the one our faith weirdly claims is God, born in the flesh. God as a baby.

This first Christmas--and, perhaps, every Christmas since--is *far* from perfect. But it is the mess of it all that makes it so very, very beautiful.

Low-wage field workers, foreigners who know more about the stars than the scriptures, angels come to earth, a confused couple with an unplanned birth--and the event itself.

A birth, not in a room, where things could be nice and tidy. The carols say it's in a stable...but if you notice, the Gospel never mentions a stable, nor an innkeeper. Innkeepers were cast in the Nativity play long after the Gospel was written.

We want to answer the Where, so we can set the Nativity Scene correctly, but the Gospel shies on the details, and just tells us why. This is all the Gospel says: *She gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

He was laid in a manger, Why? Because there was no room. Not enough room.

But why? We've assumed they were sold out of rooms. Makes sense. Or maybe they just didn't want this scandal in their establishments. But maybe... perhaps, what was about to happen is so big, there just isn't enough room. A tiny room in an inn could never be room enough for what God is about to do.

This birth would not just be for the Holy family. Soon, there would be visitors, guest invited by heavenly hosts to give witness. There needs to be more room!

Room for shepherds. Room for animals. Room for new birth. Room for us. Room for all!

For this birth can not happen behind doors and walls--God comes into the world, not in private, but in public, where crowds of weirdos and strangers--where the whole world--can witness the Advent of God's love.

Christmas needs room!

---

By this time in the season, I imagine your homes are already crowded, packed with out of town visitors. Generations, gathered under one roof. The presents. The food, ready to be prepared into a feast. And tonight, Churches, holding their biggest crowds of the year.

Christmas, literally, needs a lot of room!

It's easy in the midst of the crowds and crowded week, to miss it all. But there, at the center of the crowd, is this baby. The Christ-child, born unto us again this night.

Try to clean it all up, but you can't get around it. It's messy--birth is always messy--but this one, so much so. The scandal will be talked about for ages to come.

There are some who would tell us that Christmas should be neat and tidy. Wouldn't it be easier without the crowds? Wouldn't it be easier without the scandal and questions?

Wouldn't it be easier without all the weirdos.

The church has been trying for a long time to keep out the weirdos. Perhaps this is why we've added to the story. So much is left ambiguous, unexplained. We've constructed legends and doctrines, and built our Nativity Scenes upon conjecture, as we try to tie up the Gospel loose-ends, keeping people out.

But we can't clean up this mess. This is a Holy mess. This is how it's *meant* to be.

Keep reading through the Gospel and you will see--everywhere this one they named Jesus goes, the mess follows. Worlds collide around him, the holy and the sinners, the insiders and outsiders, the re-jects and the righteous--weirdos all crowd around him.

And he wouldn't have it any other way. This is how it's meant be. You can't wall this Savior in. You can't keep this story indoors. This must outside, for all the public! And if we don't tell it, heavenly choirs will burst into the skies singing, inviting the uninvited to bear witnesses. For this Christmas gift is for the whole world.

So, open up the doors. Tear down the walls. Build bigger tables. Pull up more chairs. We better make room. Room for the distant family member. Room for the estranged friend. Room for the sinner and the saint. Room for those on the other side of the aisle or border. Room for weirdos. Room for outcasts. Make room--in your hearts, in your faith, in your homes, in your church, out in the world.

For it is not Christmas if anyone is left out. It's not Christmas if there's not enough room. For all are always welcome at Christmas. This is the world's story. This is the world's savior--weirdos and all. Make lots and lots and lots of room, for God's big love is coming into the world this night.