

Luke 2:07-18 – Make Room: Anamorphic Christmas

Ian Fraser to King of Kings Baptist Church, 18th December, 2022.

Reading:

7 [Mary] gave birth to her first baby. It was a boy. She wrapped him in large strips of cloth. Then she placed him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. **8** There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby. It was night, and they were looking after their sheep. **9** An angel of the Lord appeared to them. And the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy. It is for all the people. **11** Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. **12** Here is how you will know I am telling you the truth. You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a large group of angels from heaven also appeared. They were praising God. They said, **14** "May glory be given to God in the highest heaven! And may peace be given to those he is pleased with on earth!"

15 When the angels had left and had gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem. Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby. The baby was lying in the manger.

17 After the shepherds had seen him, they told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child. **18** All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

19 But Mary kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart. She thought about them over and over.

20 The shepherds returned, giving glory and praise to God. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told. (Luke 2:7-20 adapted from the NIRV)

Introduction

Our recent Missions Conference featured Mike Bernard. He introduced us to a view of the world from the perspective of God's missionary heart. He called for a world view that is different to what popular journalism portrays it as. **He called for an anamorphic view** of our lives, our country and of the needs of the present time, and especially of our missionary mandate.

To illustrate it he showed a picture that makes no sense when viewed at an unhelpful angle. When

viewed from the perspective of the artist it becomes a thing of beauty. One of those pictures was that of past president Nelson Mandela, set at the site of his arrest, near



Howick, Kwa-Zulu Natal.

At that time life was hard to work out, for him. But from a better perspective, he became a symbol of the dream of a united South Africa that could be a challenge and blessing to the world.



This Christmas we want to turn from an inward-looking Christmas to a view of Christmas that God had. We want to turn from a popular view of Santa Clause, Rudolf the reindeer, and Christmas trees, lights and bells. We also want to turn from a rather shallow view that “Christmas is not about presents but about Jesus.” There is far more to it than that. We want to turn the picture around ‘till we see it hopefully the way God sees it – an anamorphic view of Christmas – God’s view of the birth of Jesus.

It is quite natural to hear, “Sorry, no room – we’re FULL”

Our theme is, “Make Room”. It comes from the verse we read where Mary laid Jesus in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

What did it feel like, to have no room at such a difficult time?

Each of us has our stories that in a small way help us to relate to that difficult day of Jesus’ birth.



Bron and I can appreciate the story when we reflect on how we felt after a long day’s journey from the Eastern Cape to the midlands of Kwa-Zulu Natal. We were hot and tired. Our daughter was three months old, and needed some ‘tlc’ after a hot and long journey. We began to realize that we couldn’t go any further. But there was Kokstad, just over the hill. And we knew that it had a Royal Hotel. We thought, “Well, if it was fit for a king and queen, we’ll be honoured to stay there.”

Unfortunately, at the Royal Hotel, we were greeted with, “Sorry, we weren’t expecting you. We’re full, but there’s a place out at the back. Perhaps it will work for you.” It was clean, but dark and dingy. The day was over; and we needed rest. It was cold. Unfortunately, the geyser wasn’t working. I don’t remember much about that trip, but it seemed a little like “Sorry, no room.”



Normally, we are not surprised. “No room” is simply a matter of “First, come, first

served.” No room is a natural thing in limited space. We got the normal treatment. We were too tired to think of finding an alternative.

Jesus got the normal treatment. “Sorry, we’re full. But there is a space out back, if that’s ok with you.” The narrative paints a normal picture, but the reader is left wondering from an anamorphic view, in hindsight, “Do you realize whom you are sending out back, to the manger?” What would the inn-keeper have done if he knew that world history was going to be shaped by what happened in their space that night?

But, no, for all the inn-keeper knew, this was an ordinary night. But God decided to show up and make clear that this was no normal or ordinary situation. An anamorphic view was needed. And His hosts of Heaven were ready to make it happen! And God was not going to send His angel to the Inn-keeper. The new perspective was going to shown out back – to shepherds!

The first thing God did was to show how big **His** room was!

1. The bigness of God’s room – room for all

“I bring you good news of great joy for ALL the people... a Saviour has been born to you. He is ‘Χριστὸς Κύριος’ - Christ the Lord” (2:10, 11). The long-awaited Messiah was born, the Saviour for all the people. No one gets left out of His great Good News.

1 The bigness of God’s room

“I bring you good news of great joy for ALL the people... a Saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord” (2:10, 11)

Luke begins his Gospel with the Jews, but ends it with Jesus saying that *“repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”* (Luke 24:47).

That’s how big God’s room is – big enough for all peoples.

God said of the Servant of Yahweh, of the Messiah to come, *“It is too small a thing for You to be my servant to restore the lost tribes of Israel. I will also make You a light to the nations that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth!”* (Isaiah 49:6).

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At the birth of Jesus, the whole world was in God’s heart through His Saviour-Son.

This is the anamorphic view of Christmas. “Come to me **all** you who labour and are

heavy laden” (Matthew 11:28). “In my Father’s house are **many** rooms” (John 14:2). “Come, **all** who are thirsty” (Isaiah 55:1). “**Whoever** comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37).

> God is the One who makes room for you and for me. Peter preached to the international crowd on the Day of Pentecost, “*This promise is for you and for your children.*”

But if that was all he said, it was not enough. But Peter added, It is for you, yes, “**and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call**” (Acts 2:39).

The angel indicated the same thing to the shepherds: This child is **for you, but also beyond you, for all the people**. This was Heaven’s anamorphic message to the shepherds.

Can we get this to ours hearts? Christmas is too small if it’s only for us, in an individualist view. Christmas, and 2023, is through us to others whom God is reaching.

2. It is the greatness of God that makes room for a better view.

“You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger”... the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem. Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’ 16 So they hurried off...” (2:12, 15, 16a).

a. **What got the shepherds out of their normal routine**, to make room in their hearts for this baby? What made them hurry off to see the baby? What happened to them to swell their hearts that this news of great joy was not just for them but for all the people?

2 It is the greatness of God that ‘makes room’ for a better view

“You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger... the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem. Let’s **see** this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’ 16 So they hurried off...” (2:12, 15, 16a)

Normally, they would have “No Room” in their hearts, because of all they faced. Can you see yourself among the shepherds if they spoke like this:

“**Sorry**, We’re too busy; we can’t leave the flock unattended; who will look after all these sheep?” or “I don’t like mangers”; “We’re into sheep; **not** donkeys, horses, cows and camels;” or “Who wants to walk where there’s donkey pooh?”; “That manger place is a bit smelly – we like the open spaces of these fields”; or “It’s too late and dark; maybe tomorrow”; or “We have to get some sleep before our shift starts”; or “Look, you’ve come to shepherds; you’ll get a better response from Bethlehem’s wives and girls.

And why not give this message to the inn-keeper? He’s really the one you should be talking to.”

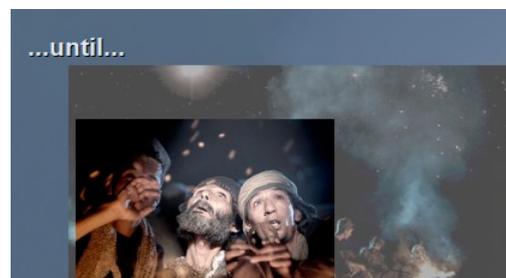


Do we see any of this kind of attitude in our hearts through the year we have just had? If we can, we can be quite clear that we simply hold a **normal view of Jesus**, as everyone else does. But a normal view of Jesus does not necessarily mean a right view of Him. We need an anamorphic view of Christ and His Christmas.

Why didn’t they have any resistance to the angels message?

b. It was the bigness of God and the fearful presence of the angel that blew their small hearts apart.

When you get blown away by who has come to you, everything changes. If our hearts are too small, maybe we need God to open them up a bit by showing us an anamorphic view of what’s happening in our world – a bigger view of God and



how active He is in the world – His heart for the world – and His work in Jesus for it.

Once these shepherds recovered from this fearful and awesome visit of the angels, they had no problem making room that very night for what needed to happen. **This world is God’s world!**

This narrative is given to us that we may get into God’s saving work for the world, and His love of the low in society, like shepherds, to be a part of the great news.

> Now we may never get such a show. But the shepherd account is given to us to get us into some of the awe and joy that they had, that we might gain an anamorphic view of Christmas, and make room for God’s saving work in the whole world.

3. A heart that has room for God has room for those He is reaching

“So they made haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby who lying a manger” (2:15, 16). “17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them” (2:17, 18).

3 A heart that has room for God has room for those He is reaching

*“So they made haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby who lying a manger” (2:15, 16)
“17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them” (2:17, 18)*

a. Mary and Joseph had open hearts to receive the shepherds. Mary and Joseph had

room in their hearts for the shepherds. Let’s see what Mary could have been struggling with.

Feeling vulnerable, away from their home in Nazareth; Not knowing or having support from the local community; Not in the most comfortable of places – definitely not expected! Constantly alert to the needs of a newborn baby; Making do with what they had – a manger nog al! Regarded less than they might have wished, in Joseph’s town! Feeling exhausted, and suffering from lack of sleep; Both were alert for their safety, especially for the baby.

Imagine if Mary or Joseph had said to the shepherds, *“Look, this is a very inconvenient time. We’ve just managed to settle the baby. We’re exhausted, and not really up to this, and we’ve run out of disposables. I’ve just managed to settle him to sleep; and then its feeding time. I’ve got to mix some formula because I don’t have enough of my own milk. You might help by organizing some wet wipes, but that’s about it, I’m sorry.”*

Can you see a little of what Mary was up against, in the stress of having her first baby?

b. Here’s the point. Mary had already agreed with the Lord to let Him have His way with her. Her words to the angel Gabriel who had appeared to her to tell her what was going to happen were, *“Let it be to me as you have said”* (Luke 1:38). She made room in her heart for Jesus, and for God’s plan for her, and for His way with her.

Mary had already agreed with the Lord to let Him have His way with her.

She had said to the angel Gabriel who had appeared to her,

“Let it be to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38)

Likewise, Joseph had already agreed to do what the Lord had shown him to do with

Mary, rather than to divorce her. He took her as his wife. It was this willingness to let God be God and to let God have His way in their lives that made room in their hearts for the shepherds. **Now for an anamorphic view of the stable!**

Aren't the pictures and sculptures we see in the shop windows and in our homes interesting? What seems to be common about the stable? They are under a roof, right? But what is glaringly missing? You might find a window in the picture or sculpture? But what should be there that isn't?

An anamorphic view of the stable...



The door! There's no door! That is a powerful picture that shows the theme of God's heart. Because His heart is flung open wide, there's no door on His heart. And there was no door over the hearts of Joseph and Mary. The manger was open for those God was bringing. Do you see the anamorphic view of Christmas to you and me at this time? **Have we a shut door over our hearts?**

When God moves us to say, "Whatever You want, Lord," we find that **He makes room for His work by removing the door of our hearts** that lock Him out and those He is reaching through us.

Let's not lose the view here. This is not about an open door for anyone to abuse our hearts – it wasn't the whole town at their manger. It was those whom God moved to be there.

In this sense the open stable illustrates the open hearts of Joseph and Mary. And it is a lesson for our own hearts. Because Joseph and Mary's hearts were open to God and His purposes, they had room to welcome the shepherds to see Jesus. And their making room for the shepherds had an incredible impact.

It opened the door for the shepherds to be the first evangelists and missionaries of the Gospel. They began a movement of the Good News of Jesus as Saviour that is still reaching the ends of the world today! Can we learn this anamorphic view for ourselves, this Christmas?

How do we make room? We make room when we let God be God and let Him have His way in our lives. When we learn from Him how big His room is for us and for others. And He has all sorts of surprises for us when we do!

Now let's apply this.

Application

So, here's the challenge. This passage is powerful in speaking to us about making room in your hearts for a bigger God, and a bigger purpose. It calls us to seek out that bigger view. It hopefully moves us to long for God to give our hearts the increased capacity that makes room for bigger things.



Seeing His love for the lonely – makes room for the lonely;
Seeing His heart for your neighborhood – makes room in your heart for your neighborhood.
Seeing His heart for the persecuted – makes room for the persecuted.

Paul pleads with the Corinthians, *“We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you... 13 As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also”* (2 Corinthians 6:11-13).

Remember, at our recent Missions Week, Mike Bernard challenged us to an anamorphic view of our lives, of these times we live in, of our country and its news, and of the world in which God has caused us to live – for such a time as this?

We then met with him, as leaders, to explore how we can develop a concern with him about those who are suffering for our faith in difficult areas where the Good News of Jesus Christ faces great opposition. **He suggested Syria as a possibility, among others.**

As a start, we thought, why not work on an anamorphic view of Christmas and 2023, and make room in our hearts for those who, like the shepherds, are easily left out in the cold. We thought of writing encouraging notes to those who are facing pressure and hardship because of their ownership of the beautiful Name of Jesus, to encourage them with a Scripture verse, to tell them that they are not forgotten.



The churches and believers in Syria are under great stress and pressure because of

the faith. “Church buildings are destroyed in many parts of Syria... Believers who come from a Muslim background are targets – the government wants to ensure that there is no social upheaval caused by religious conversion. Families & communities may reject, punish or even attack those who convert from Islam” (Open Doors World Watch List – Syria).

Mike was enthusiastic about the idea, and said that he is going to that region by March, in the New Year, and could take a pack of love notes with him. He would be visiting churches that need encouragement, and hand them to those who need them.

We have been asking the Lord for an anamorphic view of Christmas and of 2023. We would like to encourage you to let the bigness of God’s heart enlarge your own, to make this a Christmas time that makes room for those whom God is reaching and strengthening.

Think of how you can make room for God this Christmas. Think of how you can make room for those God is pointing out to you, at this time.

We want to specifically include at this time the persecuted church. So we ask you to at the close of this service to write a note of encouragement – very brief, using a simple Scripture verse, which they can look up, because they do not understand English.

Your note can be put in a box provided. We’ll get them to Mike.

Please conclude this service by writing a note of encouragement, as a sign to the Lord that you are making room for Him in your heart, and for His work through you into the lives of those He is reaching with love and encouragement and the Good News of His salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Disclaimer

As usual, with all preaching, the reader and listener is expected to take what is said and written with a critical attitude that weighs the message up for its worth; to take what is good and discard what is not worth holding on to. The Scriptures are interpreted into a message that is given with the best intent to build up and to encourage. Each person is to apply themselves to come prayerfully and thoughtfully to their own opinions about what is shared, so that they can grow in their own way, become more familiar with the Bible, and direct their hearts towards God, to find their own relationship with Him, and to follow His way for the benefit of others, and to seek out with others how best to live and do His good work in the world.