

December 25, 2011
Titus 3:4-7
Luke 2:1-7

“While They Were There”

And while they were there, the time came for Mary to deliver her child.

While they were there. In Bethlehem of Judea. Far from home. While they were there, trying to pay their taxes. While they were there in a little backwater town, with no place to stay. While they were there and the inn had no rooms and they had to make do with the shelter of a barn. While they were there, wishing that they weren't there and that things weren't such a mess. While they were there, the son of God, Jesus Christ our Savior, was born.

I'm pretty sure that having the baby while they were there was the last thing Mary and Joseph wanted. I'd be willing to bet that Mary and Joseph had hoped that this could have waited. I'd be willing to bet that neither one of them wanted to be in Bethlehem at this time. I'd be willing to be that they didn't want to be expecting and on the road.

Though I'd also be willing to be that they didn't really like being in their home town Nazareth, surrounded by the scandal this baby caused, with everyone questioning Mary's virtue and Joseph's paternity. What an

ordeal. But I'd be willing to bet that once those labor pains started, once Mary was hurting and straining and terrified—and Joseph was running around with no idea what to do—I'd be willing to bet that neither one of them wanted this to happen while they were there. The birth of their son, in this unexpected place at this unexpected time, far away from home, in a stable.

That's when it happened. That's when the Son of God came into the world. While they were there. Not at a place that was convenient or suitable. Not at a time when his parents were comfortable or safe. Not in an environment where there were lots of relatives and friends handy to help out. Not at a location when the nursery was there waiting for him. Not at the moment when they had all the diapers and the burp cloths and the onesies ready. Not when everything was perfect and everyone was in place. It was while they were there. And everything was out of order and everyone was out of place. And Joseph was thinking, "Now is really not a good time for this." And Mary was thinking, "Are you serious, God? Really?" It was while they were there, in Bethlehem, far from home,

shacking up in a barn and inconvenienced in every way that Jesus Christ was born.

If this story has a message for us today, it's this. This is how God enters our world. This is how the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us.

While we are there. While we are in the space where we aren't prepared.

When we are occupied with something else. While we are trying to deal

with how our plans have fallen apart. While we aren't where we hoped

we would be. We're in Bethlehem. Far from home. Trying to deal with

taxes and government paperwork. In Bethlehem. Far from home. Trying

to sort out our family or our future. In Bethlehem. Far from home.

Where we can't even find a place to stay and we are stuck in some cattle shed.

That's when Jesus Christ is born to us. With horrible timing. In the

middle of all our mess. At the time when things seem to be going the

most wrong. When our lives are about as imperfect as they can get.

That's when Jesus Christ is born to us. "When the goodness and loving-

kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any

works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy..."

God doesn't come to be with us when we get things just right or when we are good enough or smart enough or ready enough. God comes while we are there; while we are frustrated and flummoxed and in need of a Savior.

That's when Jesus Christ is born. In Bethlehem. In a manger. Far from home. And maybe that's what we should expect from God in our lives, too. Maybe we should start expecting God to show up when we least expect it. Maybe we should start looking for hope where things are hopeless. And light where there is darkness. And joy where there is worry. And a baby where there is a manger. To you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior. In Bethlehem, of all places. May the grace and forgiveness of God be born and alive and in the flesh among us this day and every day.