

## ***Shiloh United Methodist Church***

### **This Is Us**

Christmas Story

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In the hymn “It Came Upon A Midnight Clear” the author does not necessarily describe the manger where Jesus was born, but instead his hopes for the Christ child.

While we are used to hearing the story as Jesus being born into a stable, we are learning now that Jesus was born instead in the home, most likely of a relative. The line so often translated saying, “There was no room for them in the inn.” Refers to the guest quarters of a house in Judea at the turn of a millennia. See homes at the time made room for the animals indoors and the guest room was often quiet and set off to the side, but with the crowding it seems Mary was giving the center part of the room...we know this because the manger would have been located there, where the animals might eat, right in the middle of the home, at the center of the season.

We all have been working to bring Christ to the center of the season, trying to get those last minute things right, hoping we got that detail completed. Hoping we put the guest in the place of importance. However, God rarely demands the place of importance to emerge into our lives.

Edmund Sears was well educated clergyman, he went Harvard Divinity School, but he that did not make him demand the big pulpit in the large city. He instead enjoyed serving in rural western Massachusetts. In the small churches where he had time to do his writing.

Off the beaten path, Edmund Sears would watch as a fledgling nation would work to try and emerge with ideals as big as the dreams of its people. It was off the beaten path he saw the patterns of division emerge, neighbor calling out neighbor, economics driving morality, and a peculiar institution of slavery creating divisions of class and race too big to overcome. It was as he watched this pain that Sears wrote "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear."

Off the beaten path...one man hoped the people would listen to the message of Christmas...Listen to the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza which few sing and isn't even in our hymnbook.

"But with the woes of sin and strife  
The world has suffered long;  
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled  
Two thousand years of wrong;  
And man, at war with man, hears not  
The love-song, which they bring:  
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,  
And hear the angels sing!"

From off the beaten path calls to the people of power, that another way is possible. Sounds like something that would be useful in our day. This is why I love the Christmas story it is good for any age in history. It is timeless because it is not the wise or powerful that have the answers, but a God birthed child laid in the animal eating trough in the middle of peasants home. The unlikely things change the world.

Take for example the life of Joseph Mohr, his whole life is a sort of Christmas story. Born just before Christmas to a single mom, with an absent father he wandered the streets of the city, while his single mom worked odd jobs to provide a run down home for him.

Noticed by the pastor in town, he helped him gain an education. Probably because of this one positive adult relationship, this boy sought to enter the ministry. However, without much skill or training he moved from temporary assignment in one church or another.

Finally, Pastor of a little church invited him to lead a Christmas Service. Only to realize he had no time to prepare, there was no choir, and the organ...well it was broken.

The Pastor hoped to make Joseph Mohr his fall guy for a poorly planned Christmas service.

It is off the beaten path that God does something...Joseph Mohr asked a friend to set a poem he had written to music. They sang the song together for the Christmas service.

He was of course dismissed from that church, but the song had struck a chord. Joseph would land at a little church in the mountains that would love him, where he would help the poor orphaned children attend school. He stayed in that church until he died.

We would not know Joseph Mohr's story except, that song he and his friends sang, well you have sung it before, most likely. It was Silent Night, Holy Night. A song sung on Christmas the world over, was written off the beaten path, last minute and on a night the church was at its worst, letting a poor, struggling man, who had a call from God, take the fall for poor planning.

You see what I hope for on Christmas Eve, What I hope for all of us as we leave here, is that we go remembering that God will not wait for the perfect place to bring love...it is happening before our eyes, under our noses, and off the beaten path. The story of Christ may be fun, but the truth is that story is happening in Billings, in Montana, in Israel, in

Mexico, in China, in Russia...it is a story of love and it is our opportunity to make space in our the center of our home for love to be born.

Special Appreciation for stories that come from:

<https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/silent.htm>

<https://livestream.com/stpaulshelena/events/6789547/videos/145178589>

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-it-came-upon-a-midnight-clear>

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