

# ALL IN THE FAMILY + + +

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Man, who is excited that Christmas is finally here? Yeah, right? It is such a great thing and such a great night. How many of you traveled to be here or to be at wherever you're at at your campuses, traveled to be here for this Christmas? How many of you travelers are out there? Oh man, God bless you, right? Traveling is sometimes so difficult and so hard.

Let me tell you a little bit about traveling in our family. My girls left on Monday for Michigan and my wife and I have two different philosophies for packing and her philosophy is you write down a list and you make the list of everything you have and on that list has a little check box and then you just put a check box and you don't forget anything. And that's her philosophy and both of my daughters carry the same philosophy. Well, she actually still makes their list. My 18 year old on Sunday night said, mom, where's my list there? So, but that's their philosophy as well.

My philosophy is I make a list as well, but the list is here. Any of you have the same philosophy as me where it's like, I'm good. I know exactly what I need. I've got it and I do and here's the way I do it. So you can see it. Like I just say, okay, I'm gonna be gone for three days and I'm just gonna get dressed for three days. So I go, I need underwear. I get underwear and I get three sets of underwear. Then I go, I need socks and I grab three sets of socks. And then I go, I need shirts and I say, well, I grab three sets of t-shirts, three sets of polos and I'm good to go. Then I go, I need sets of pants. And so then I grabbed three sets of pants and that's how I pack.

I'd love to say that my way is foolproof and perfect, but I can't lie on Christmas Eve preaching a message because I'm now notorious that every time we go somewhere, I forget something. I've had to walk a half a mile in San Antonio, Texas, where I was attending a conference because I forgot a belt. I've had to buy a new shirt because I forgot that I needed a dress shirt for that event. I recently, I always pack my workout gear and I put in my workout shirts and I put in my workout headbands and I put in my shoes. I'd put in my extra set of workout socks and I went to go work out and I realized I didn't have any shorts. And like for the briefest of moments, I thought, could I do this in my underwear? Like, would there really be anyone in, no one else is ever in the hotel workout room. And then I thought better of it.

I've even, I've even forgot not once, but twice, underwear. One time, I actually had to stop and buy truck stop underwear. And those were just one use underwears that I just threw away every time. I would like to say to you, and actually coming into tonight, as of just two days ago, I was gonna tell you, my wife's system might be better. She's never forgot anything. I can show you later. She texted me this morning and said, you're not gonna believe it, I forgot underwear. And so now she's buying underwear in Michigan and I'm kind of happy about that. Man, traveling just can be so stressful for us. It can be when we're actually at our worst. It can be when we're at our most frantic or at our most vulnerable.

I don't know if you feel like this, but I feel like sometimes when we travel, that's really just a microcosm of sometimes what it feels like in our families. Our families can feel like it's a great thing to be able to

go and to do it and we've got this wonderful family and we love it and it's absolutely beautiful, but then sometimes it's just absolutely a mess. Matter of fact, tonight, that's what I want us to discover is that as the family of God, you're a beautiful mess.

So turn to someone in your family right now and just say, you're beautiful. Now turn to someone else in your family or maybe the same person and say, I'm a mess. Yeah, yeah, that's so great, so great. Hopefully no son-in-law didn't turn to a mother-in-law and say, you're a mess because that's not what I said to do. So that was totally on your own. Good luck tonight.

Tonight, we're gonna discover that Jesus stepped into a family to bring you into his family. We're gonna invite us together to think about three things. One, to make room for Jesus in the mess of our lives and two, to receive your place in the family of God and three, to extend that invitation to others.

So let's dive in as we make room for Jesus in the mess. In Luke chapter two, one through three, and when you see the words in yellow, will you just read those with me? In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that should be registered and all went to be registered and all went to be registered each to his own town. So Caesar issues a decree and then goes and makes a salad. That was pretty good. Like everywhere I rehearsed that, that went over well.

And what does this mean? It means that every single family was uprooted. What else does this mean? It means that no matter what, if you're tired or pregnant or stressed or elderly, everyone is on the move. They're all having to go back to their own hometowns and they have to do this. There's no choice and they're uprooted in their lives and where they're at.

You see, that means that this is not just a political proclamation, but it's also a divine direction. And what looks like that political disruption is actually the divine direction, right? And so they go and they're doing this.

Joseph and Mary, who is great with child, Luke 2, four and five, and Joseph also went up from Galilee with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. By the way, this was not how they had envisioned it. This was not how they wanted it to happen. And this wasn't part of their plan, but they had to go. Isn't it that way in life? Sometimes we have the way that we plan everything, but it just doesn't always work out that way.

When my oldest daughter was four years old, we as a pastor, like Christmas and Christmas Eve and Christmas day and kind of following, like we try to find time with family where just our family could get together. And so we always said, let's just do it a couple of days early.

So this one year, my wife says to me, why don't we go up to Frankenmuth? It's kind of like this resorty little town about 45 minutes north of where we live and just spend a couple of days there, do the water park. Macy will love it. It's indoors. It's perfect for the winter. And I said, yeah, that sounds great. Like, let's try it. And so we do that.

And as we're up there, everything was wonderful. And we came back and we had a, the first Christmas Eve service was gonna start. And so it was about a one o'clock service. So we drove back and we were well ahead of time. And so we said, why don't we get lunch at Jimmy John's as a family? Because then basically like once Christmas Eve service started, I don't see my family for a couple of days.

And so I said, yeah, we'll do lunch. And then you guys can drop me off at church and then I'll see you in a few days. And we're finishing up this great Jimmy John's lunch and I'm throwing stuff away. My wife's packing stuff up and there's this little tiny ledge at the bottom of the glass windows between the table and it's a tight squeeze.

And Macy's walking between the table and the glass ledge and on the glass ledge. And all of a sudden, I guess she falls because I just hear a blood curdling scream and see blood flowing from her mouth where she just jammed the table into her gums and everything right there.

And so Lori immediately is going to grab all these napkins and paper towels. Macy runs to me and now she's just hugging me and on my shirt that I'm about to wear to church for the first of multiple Christmas Eve, I've just got her blood everywhere. It wasn't anything like we planned.

And that's what happens sometimes in life. That's what happens to Joseph and Mary. But God's promises always reign true in the midst of when the plans go awry. Micah five, verse two talks about this when it says, you Bethlehem, though you're small among the clan of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be a ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times.

The promise is there. And the promise of God to give grace of God has always been His plan, which never alters, never fails, no matter what the mess looks like, no matter how bloody it feels like life is getting. His promise has been grace from the very second we fell in Genesis.

And so even though there's no room for Mary and Joseph, it does not mean there's no grace. While there may be no room, but there is not no grace. Grace is going to flow. It's going to triumph.

And so they head. They head to Bethlehem where there is no room, where there is no family that is nearby, where there is no midwife that is mentioned. There's no space for them and there's no privacy for them. And yet here comes this child, uninvited and unwanted, Jesus.

And what we see is from that very moment that Jesus is there in the crib, He's already beginning to set up His moment on the cross because there was no room then for Jesus in the world. And there's no room now for Jesus in the world. But what we know is even though humanity has said no, God still says yes, because His love is for you. His love is for you. That's the good news of Jesus.

In Luke 2, six and seven, it says, while they were there, the time came for her to give birth and they laid Him in a manger because there was no place for them in the end. It was that time.

And so what this means for you and for me is the incarnation means there's no place too humble or too hard for God to enter in. There's no place too humble or too hard for God to enter in.

Let me say that to you another way. There's no matter what you've done, no matter who you are and no matter where you've been, God's grace is for you. And His desire is for you and Him to enter in to a lifelong relationship of love as you being His people and He being your God.

There is no one that has gone so far that He has said it is too much. The incarnation says to you that nothing is too hard for God to enter in.

And by the way, it also shows to us that no one is without need of Him to enter in. No one is too great.

So I wanna invite you tonight to your first action. I'm gonna invite you to stop. Stop waiting for everything to calm down before you welcome Jesus into your life. Stop saying, oh, you know what, when life gets easier, when the mess stops getting crazy, when life stops getting crazy, then it will be okay. Then I'll be ready for God. Then I'll be ready to pray. Then I'll be ready to read the scriptures. Then I'll be ready. When life gets less chaotic, when I'm less busy, when I retire, when I don't have to do so much, when I don't have so many plans, when I'm not so detailed with doctor's appointments and with all the other things, stop waiting for everything to calm down because Jesus wants to enter into your life right here, right now.

And here's the other thing. If God wasn't afraid of the stable, He's not afraid of your situation. He's not afraid of where you've been. He's not ashamed of what you've done. He's not hesitant on who you are.

This is the same God that entered into the world who also formed and fashioned you in the womb, who counted the number of hairs on your head and who had you on His mind as He died on that cross and said, it is finished and brought peace with God and with you through His victorious tomb. That's the situation He overcame for you. It is yours.

And so now tonight I wanna invite you to receive your place in the family because that's what this message is. It's a message all about how we move from the manger which shows us forgiveness to becoming the family of God.

You see, Luke shows us why Jesus came, but Jesus shows us, I'm sorry, Luke shows us how Jesus came. Jesus shows us why He came. And He came because He loves you. And He wants to spend eternity with you as His family.

And that's an important piece. Luke 2 10 and 11 says, fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day a Savior.

Can you look at that with me for a second? Notice what it says. He brings you good news, not good advice. He brings you great joy, not fear. This is for all the people, not those that are just polished and have everything together. And He is a Savior, not a scorekeeper of all the wrongs that you have done.

This is the God who stepped into the world to make you family, to bring you in to His family. This is who you get as your God. And praise God for that.

So one of the things that we know is that you get to be family because you belong to the family of God. And doesn't it feel so great to belong to something?

So Lori has this thing she does every time I travel. I don't really pack till about the night before. A lot of reasons why I might forget things. But I always put my suitcase on my dresser a few days at some point.

And oftentimes I will go to unpack my suitcase at the hotel. And I am one of those people, whether I'm staying one night or eight nights, it doesn't matter. I unpack everything. I just move into the hotel. I dresser drawers, the closet, everything.

And I will always find a dryer sheet. Now this is a little inside note from Lori to me. And what it means is, it means from her that she loves me, she's thinking of me, and she can't wait till I get home.

And it tells me that I belong to her, that even though I'm far from her, I'm not far from her. We're always near one another.

And that's the good news that you and I have because you're never far from God. God is always near to you. And you're always near his heart. He loves you.

You're not a guest at the table. You're an heir, which means you've been adopted into the table. Matter of fact, right now, I just want you to say, I'm an heir. Say it again, I'm an heir. Say it one more time, I'm an heir.

By the way, kids, today, after the service, I want you to come up and you'll see either Seth or myself up here. And if you say to us, I'm an heir, you will get a gold chocolate coin at all of our campuses. So kids come on up after the service and say that to us and receive a gold coin at our campuses.

And here's the good news. You are an heir because you've been adopted into the family of God. So receive your place at the table because Luke chapter two is not about a baby being born. It's about you being reborn into God's family.

Now I know sometimes it feels like that's messy and that's hard. And sometimes it feels like it's just, there's too many unmentionables that we can have.

When I travel, I also travel with a plastic bag. And I use this because when I pack up to go home, this is where all my underwear and my socks go, except for that one trucker experience.

And so this, and I keep all my unmentionables away. And tonight I wanna remind you that God has invited you to extend this family invitation to someone else that may think that they're a mess.

They may think that they're just too far from God as well. Someone you know that just says, I'm not a religious person. And to say, well, tell me more about that.

Because in Luke two, eight and nine, we see that in the same region, there were shepherds and an angel of the Lord appeared to them.

The shepherds, they're the margin people. They're the people sent out in the field. No one ever was saying, hey, you know what? Let's throw a party. Let's invite the shepherds on over. Like no one wants the shepherds around. They're unclean. They're unworthy. And they're just a little uncouth.

And yet God goes to them first. And the shepherds are the ones who come.

And in 12, it says, this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in a swaddling cloth, lying in a manger. And this sign is not a sign of glory. It's a sign of humility. As God stepped into the world as a child, a baby, God became a human and a baby.

And heaven couldn't be silent about it in 13 and 14, the glory of God in the highest and on earth, peace among those whom he has pleased, the angel choir sang.

And what did the shepherds do? In 15 and 17, they said, let's go to Bethlehem. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told to them.

You see, these shepherds that no one wanted, that were the outsiders in the margin, became the very first preachers. Before the apostles, before John the Baptist, before the women at the tomb, before Paul, before Martin Luther, before you and before me, they went and shared the good news of Jesus.

Now, maybe you're thinking to yourself, wait a minute though, who am I to share the good news? I'm not one of those perfect Instagram families like you see on the screens here. This is an actual King of Kings family. They posted this and I asked for help if I could use it.

But here's the good news. You don't have to be a perfect family. You just have to be you as the family of God.

And our authenticity of who we are allows us to share greatly of how much God loves us.

And so what did those shepherds do? They went back home. They packed their bags and in verse 20, they returned glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and they had seen.

It's what they do. It's what you and I do.

Tonight, we're gonna have an opportunity. We're gonna have an opportunity to make space, invite grace and to share the story.

You're gonna get to be a people who sing silent night where you're gonna allow the light of God to enter in to your family and your life.

We're gonna allow the mercy of God to enter into your mess and to know that he's not far from you. He doesn't run from you, he runs to you.

And where you're going to get to see the grace of God be shared as the light of the world lives through you, not just tonight, but every night.

Because what we know tonight is you don't have to travel here to meet Jesus. Everywhere you travel as the family of God, people meet Jesus in you. It's part of the family of the Messiah and you are part of his beautiful messianic family today, tomorrow and forever.

Will you join me in a word of prayer?

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for sending your son into the world so that we can be the open door of an invitation that was extended to us to someone else.

That there is room for our place with you as family.

That we've received your invitation of grace and your spirit has moved us to say yes.

And now by that same spirit, we share that you are Lord and we tell others of the good news of Jesus who came into the world to be our savior, to be our friend.

So yes, oh Lord, on this oh holy night, your light is bright through us and to your world so the darkness may never overcome it.

And all of God's people said, amen, amen.