**4th Sunday of Advent – Theme: Peace  
Undoing Excess!** Luke 2:1-7

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Slides** | **Sermon** |
| 1 | Title Slide |
| 2 | Introduction  How does this box make you feel (refer to overstuffed wrapped box in the front of the sanctuary)?   1. Delighted that you got all you want! 2. Bit sad that you overspent and that you will face the credit card bills in Jan. 3. Happy that you had the resources to get all those things. 4. Despair because you know others who did so much more than you could afford.   How about this feeling?  We feel overstuffed! We feel like we have overdone it this year – especially when we’ve neglected in helping the less fortunate. We feel we now have more stuff with which we must deal!  Where will we put it? It will clutter our houses and our lives even more! |
| 3 | Transition to scripture: Today’s lesson is a familiar one – the trip Mary and Joseph make to Bethlehem. We know the reason. The Roman government has declared that a census of who lives where needs to be taken. Why? Rome needed to know where people lived and what property they owned so they could decide how and where to collect their taxes. So, Rome required everyone within the empire to participate, even if it wasn’t a good time as in Mary’s case, due at any time!  So off they go over their 11-day trek to Bethlehem from Nazareth because Joseph was from Bethlehem. This is an interesting story for sure. But it is made more interesting because over the years the Church created a character that wasn’t named in the passage. It is the innkeeper. All that scripture says is that while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem it became time for Mary to give birth and that she laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. |
| 4 | But there’s something about human nature that makes us want to fill in the details of a story that we feel is incomplete. So, how is it that the Son of God ends up in a manger which is an animal feed trough?  So appears an innkeeper. We assume that that’s where Joseph would want his pregnant wife to be in case she has her baby. So surely they want to be at the inn. But obviously it was full. Afterall, everyone who had their family roots in Bethlehem would be there to register for the census. Now it is interesting how the innkeeper is portrayed – He has no rooms – “Go away!” Some say it was his wife (another created character) who pleads Mary’s case, and the innkeeper relents and says she can stay in the stable. But it could have been the innkeeper. He could have had compassion for their circumstances and said, “I’m terribly sorry that there just aren’t any rooms, but I know it’s not much in the condition you are in, but you and your wife can stay in the stable. My son (another invented character) has put out fresh straw and it will be clean. And he can get you all the water you may need.”  No matter how we fill in the gaps, what is common to all is the compassion that is directed toward Mary and Joseph. The compassion helps us feel better about the difficult situation Mary and Joseph found themselves. |
| 5 | Now let’s look at today. Unlike Joseph and Mary who had so little, we look around us and see how much we have – lots of stuff – presents galore.   * Have warm & cozy homes * Have decoration and trees * Have warm clothing * Have family around us   So, with so much, we really like that someone showed compassion to Mary and Joseph and the newborn Jesus! It makes us feel less guilty.  But how might we allow that sense of compassion override our need to have so much excess in our Christmas?  What would Christmas be like if your box of presents were just one or two? How might compassion convert the value of your excess into ways of serving others?  I know most of you have finished your Christmas buying by now. But in this last week, can you let your compassion for others lead to not adding to your excess but sharing your love and presence with those who need that kind of gift this year? Who in your circle of friends need your presence and love and not your stuff? Who in the shelters need socks and clothing instead of those ugly Christmas sweaters? Who needs a kind word, a joyful song to lift their spirits?  I heard of one family who finally realized that they were giving gifts to one another that they really didn't need and sometimes didn't want. So one year they started a different tradition. They shared charities and church missions that were important to them. Then they picked a couple they all wanted to support. So all the money formerly spent on un needed excess was given to their chosen mission. What a difference it made to the people the missions helped! What a difference it made in their lives to get some of the excess away! And what a difference it made to feel the compassion it developed in them! And how wonderful that they felt more of the Peace of Christ that year and in succeeding years. |
| 6 | Calvin Coolidge reminds us, “Christmas is not a time nor a season but a state of mind. To cherish peace and goodwill, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas.” |
| 7 | On this 4th Sunday of Advent when we are proclaiming peace, reduce your excess so your compassion might bring a bit more peace to your lives.  The choir is finally back after almost two years! They are singing parts of an old but good cantata, “Candles and Carols.” Listen to the words – let them sink in. If you do, you will feel God’s compassion for you and know the peace that compassion brings! -Amen |