

# Christmas Playlist: Away in a Manger

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning and welcome here for this Sunday, December 10th. I was talking to Connor and Connor's girlfriend, who are both in post-secondary, and they said, a week and our semesters are already over.

It's crazy. Time is going by so quickly. So my name is Kent Dixon and I'm the lead pastor here and it's my joy to be that for sure. So on each Sunday of the Advent season, we'll be lighting candles, and we started last week, to recognize the four virtues that Jesus brings to us. And those are hope, peace, joy, and love. So this morning, as we continue in the season of Advent, we're lighting our first candle again, which represents hope.

And we're lighting our second candle, which symbolizes peace. Today, like Mary, and it's so fitting that we sang, Mary, did you know this morning? Today, like Mary, we wait for the Christ child. We celebrate all that God has already done and we say in the words of Luke 1, 46 and 47, my soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

[ 1 : 13 ] We reflect on the wonder and the precious name of Jesus, our Savior and our Prince of Peace. Today, let's focus on the peace that comes from knowing that God is in control.

He is still in control despite what we may see in the world around us. And Jesus remains always the God who saves.

We recognize again this morning that we're in this season in the church calendar known as Advent. And this season includes four Sundays, we're on number two, the lead up to Christmas.

And it's in this season of Advent that we're anticipating not only Christmas itself, and the time when we worship Jesus as the Word made flesh.

So welcome to this second Sunday in our Advent sermon series, Christmas playlist. Now, some of you are wearing ugly Christmas sweaters, not directly connected, but it's fun.

[ 2 : 15 ] And so we're doing that as well. So if you see people making fashion choices, myself included, this morning that you yourself might not make, there is method to our madness, just so you know.

So throughout this series, we're going to be looking at four different well-known Christmas songs. And they have biblical references and significance for our lives today.

And last week, if you were here, you remember that we started off with the first Noel. We looked at the angel of the Lord appearing to the shepherds in Luke 2 when they announced Jesus' birth.

So today we're going back to Luke 2 to learn more about that significant event. The one that took place away in a manger. So this is the song that we're obviously going to be thinking about this morning.

We sang it this morning. So let's jump right in with Luke 2, verses 6 and 7. And you can turn there. There's a Bible in the pew in front of you, or you can listen as I read.

[ 3 : 17 ] While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Some translations say there was no room at the inn. Can you remember a time in your life when you wanted to see a movie or a concert, or maybe wanted to go out for dinner somewhere special, have a meal at your favorite restaurant, but you wound up disappointed?

You wound up frustrated because there was no space for you there. You expected to get in, and there was no space. So hold on to that memory, that sensation, that feeling, because this sets the stage a bit for Mary's circumstances as she prepares to give birth to the Savior of the world.

The Bible tells us there was no lodging for them. So where was Jesus born? Away in a manger. Probably sounds a bit odd for the Son of God entering the world that God himself had created.

Have you ever thought of it that way before, that here's God in the flesh coming to creation as he created it, and there's no hotel room for him?

[ 4 : 40 ] Pretty interesting perspective. Away in a manger is a powerful song. I'm just going to digress for two seconds. As I was thinking about this song and what it means to me personally, I remember, to this day, I remember standing on a stage in a very small church that I grew up in.

Small, small, small. With all the lights off in the sanctuary, and lights on on the stage, singing away in a manger as little shorter than I am now, with a little group of other kids.

And we learned that song, and we were sore afraid. We got what the shepherds felt like. But that's what resonates with me, is I remember that song being a powerful thing, a powerful story in my life from very, very young.

So in this season of Advent, we're anticipating Christmas. And so here we are at the manger. So this morning, we're going to explore the significance of the manger and this birth story, and we're going to consider some of the things that are important for us to remember as we consider it, as we think it through.

And so the first important thing is that the manger points to someone unique. To understand the significance of the manger being unique, we need to revisit our passage from last week, just briefly.

[ 6 : 04 ] Do you remember what the angel of the Lord said to the shepherds about Jesus? Luke 2, verse 12 says, and this is the angel speaking, this will be a sign to you.

You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. So the angel there identified two important details in this message to the shepherds.

Strips of cloth and the manger. And so historians seem to agree that at this time, in this geographical region, most babies would have been born and then wrapped in swaddling clothes, wrapped in strips of cloth, as the Bible says.

But, here's the but, there doesn't seem to be any other historical account of a child being born in a manger. Not a common place for a child to be placed after they're born.

So this aspect, that particular detail, would have been quite odd. Would have been out of the ordinary. It would have been unique. So imagine a manger.

[ 7 : 16 ] Now, throughout your life, you've probably seen a billion nativity scenes. Usually they're pristine. They're often very white, like ours is in the foyer there.

Very, all the clothes are white. But imagine what a manger would have actually been like. It would have been filthy. Have you ever fed a cow or a horse or an animal like that out of your hand?

There's gook that gets left behind. So this is a manger that animals have eaten out of. So it's pretty gooky. It's pretty gross, pretty dirty.

But certainly not, ideally, a bed for a child. Have you ever thought of it that way? It was a trough for feeding animals.

And lots of troughs, I mean, I have family members and friends who are agricultural people who raise animals and their operations and their barns and everything are clean.

[ 8 : 18 ] This was not that. This was the first place, though, that the Son of God in the flesh would have laid his head. But why did it happen that way?

Couldn't there have been a better plan? Well, couldn't God have made a way for his Son, for him to be coming in the flesh, to be in a more appropriate place?

As I said before, certainly God could have reserved the finest suite at the finest hotel for his Son to arrive. Couldn't the Savior of mankind had a more pleasant and appropriate place, by our standards anyway, to draw his first breath?

Well, the answer to all of these things lies in a simple phrase that you may have heard in a song or may have heard someone say in a prayer or a conversation. There's no one like Jesus.

You heard that phrase before? According to this passage, the angels saw fit to give the cloth and manger to the shepherds as a sign.

[ 9 : 26 ] So it seems that never in human history, other than this instance in Luke 2 regarding Jesus, has there been a record of a king of any kind, any description, being born in a manger.

So with that in mind, we have no other option then to trust and believe that Jesus Christ and his birth is truly unique. He's truly the king of kings and the Lord of lords.

So the evidence that's found even in the most unlikely of places is right here. A food trough, a manger. It's unlikely and unique.

The second important thing is that the manger points to the cross. You ever thought of that before? Where and how Jesus was born isn't only significant for that event, that night alone.

I believe the manger also points us towards an eternally significant event in Jesus' life, one that would prove to be of the utmost importance, the cross and his crucifixion.

[10:41] Now if you think to yourself, wow, is Pastor Ken ever ruining Christmas for me? There's a connection. To better understand this manger and cross connection, we can look to something that Paul wrote that was profound about Jesus in the book of Philippians.

Philippians 2, verses 6 to 8. If you want to go there, you can. Paul says, Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

So it seems that Christ not only took the position of a slave or a servant or the least of these kind of a person at the end of his life, but in the case of the manger, his arrival represented even less than the status of a slave or a servant.

Jesus was born into nothing in those circumstances. God, the all-powerful creator of heaven and earth, not only decided to enter a broken world full of broken people like you and me, he also decided to take it a step further and do it in the humblest possible way he could have.

[12:19] You probably remember the scene later in the Gospels when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt. Rather than being the center of a massive entourage, leading an army, riding a massive stallion, girded for battle, Jesus' entrance is humble.

Jesus modeled humility himself as an example to us because he calls us to live from humility in our own lives. If you've ever watched a biographical documentary or read a biography, you may have heard this phrase before.

It's probably familiar. So-and-so came from humble beginnings. You heard that phrase before? Walt Disney came from humble beginnings and yet rose to, you know, it's familiar.

So what it means, what it's getting at is that the person didn't start with much or that their ultimate achievements, their ultimate things that they accomplished in their lives came in strong contrast to the expectations people might have had for them based on humble beginnings.

But what a reversal of this concept in Jesus. In the case of Christ, he had everything possible at his command. But he laid all that down to take up a humble position and be born as a baby in Luke 2.

[13:49] I don't know if you can relate to this personally, but for me, there are times when I'm recognized or congratulated for something. And I can see, I can feel the pride monster rising.

That's a part of me that craves attention. Maybe you have that in yourself. Maybe there's times when I have done something and in my prideful heart, I want someone to recognize what I've done, but it doesn't happen.

In those moments, I can struggle, really struggle, to resist the sinful temptation to blow my own horn. Are you a horn blower at times?

It's sinful to seek attention for our own sake. Drawing attention to ourselves or seeking praise from others is not what God has called us to do.

It's not what Jesus modeled for us, not even remotely. We are people who are called to serve in silence, put others before ourselves, and remember that God sees everything that we do, and it is ultimately for him.

[15:04] Jesus' humble beginning in the manger leads to another humble position at the cross.

Rather than resisting the arrest and trial that led to his crucifixion, Jesus chose his father's way and his father's will, one that included submission and humility and ultimately sacrifice.

So the third important thing is that the manger points to disciples. We've talked a lot about humility this morning.

We've also referred to the fact that God often chooses the most unlikely of people, and we've done sermon series on this in the past. God chooses the most unlikely people or places to include them in his purposes.

And the manger scene includes several different people. We know many of them well. But none perhaps more significant than those who first received the message about Christ's birth.

The shepherds. Has anyone played a shepherd over the course of their church acting history?

Everyone? Bathrobes? We certainly could understand if God had chosen to reveal Christ's birth to

kings or political leaders at that time, right?

[16:28] That would have made sense to our brains. But instead, God shows his upside-down kingdom at work again by choosing to reveal Jesus' birth to the world through what would have seemed like to most people truly the least of these shepherds.

Shepherds were tasked with watching over sheep. And sheep would have been a key part of the life in that time. That culture. But a shepherd?

Not a celebrated vocation in any means. Can't imagine too many moms saying, what would you like to be, Ibrahim, when you grow up?

A shepherd, mother. Rats. But necessary, right? Critical. And these folks were nowhere near, not even close, probably not even ranking on the social radar at all.

They didn't even own their own property in most cases. They would have traveled from place to place living in tents. Or if they had high anxiety, maybe they lived in two tents.

[17:42] Ha ha. But they would have been uncomplicated people. Do you feel like your life is too complicated sometimes? Imagine being a shepherd. Pick up and go. There's something freeing about that, I think.

So they would have lived a nomadic life with a very straightforward job. And yet, these are the people for whom, whatever reason, God chose to make the first evangelists of Christ's birth. Luke 2, verse 17 says, when they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

So when the shepherds recognized what was happening, they couldn't keep this news to themselves. We have good news. Are we good at keeping it to ourselves?

Food for thought. So also, maybe this reminds us of another story later in the gospel accounts. One when Jesus is not born, but resurrected.

[18:48] So turn to Luke 24, if you're still in Luke. 24, verses 1 to 9. And it says, on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

In their fright, the women bowed down with their faces to the ground. But the men said to them, why do you look for the living among the dead?

He is not here. He has risen. Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee. The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again.

Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the others. Have you ever thought about this before?

[19:59] My friends, I believe the shepherds are, in a sense, meant to foreshadow the disciples who would come to follow Jesus, who would take his message to the world.

Ordinary people with ordinary stories, others. But God used them in extraordinary ways. And today, I believe this can be your story too.

Maybe you've been questioning whether God will use you. Whether God can take someone like you with your degree of brokenness, your sin, your past that you maybe are ashamed of.

whether God can take all those things and still use you and them for his glorious purpose. The answer, quite simply, is yes.

Yes, he can. Friends, when we give God our yes, be prepared. And I speak from personal experience.

[21:08] He will likely, very likely, call you out of your comfort zone. My comfort zone is way back there somewhere.

He asked, we said yes, and we're still holding on. God only asks us to seek to be obedient and to trust him in the process.

He doesn't want us to figure it out on our own. He is the one who will guide and convict and refine and lead us on the path to everlasting life.

So maybe today this needs to be a prayer that you pray. And you'll find it in the book of Psalms. Psalm 139 verses 23 and 24.

As I say it, think of this as a prayer over you. Search me, God, and know my heart.

[ 22 : 15 ] Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.

Search me, Lord. Test me. See if there is any offensive way in my heart and lead me to everlasting life. My friends, the significance of the manger is so much more than this beloved carol we've explored a bit this morning.

It's so much more, as you can see, than a Christmas only concept. And my prayer for each of you is that this year, the humble birth of the King of Kings will take on a new significance for you as you reflect on it in the days ahead.

God bless you. Amen.