

## Where Is Baby Jesus?

### Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

A Charlie Brown Christmas debuted on national prime time television on December 9, 1965. 53 years later, the beloved animated show is a classic and watching it has become a tradition for many families. There is one moment in this show that goes largely unnoticed.

Linus is most associated with his ever present security blanket that is a major source of ridicule for the otherwise mature and thoughtful Linus. He simply refuses to give it up.

Until this climactic moment. Linus is sharing what Christmas is all about by reciting the verses that describe the shepherds in the fields watching over their flocks when angels stood before them and they were terrified. One of the angels said to the shepherds “do not be afraid” and at that instant Linus drops his blanket.

It’s pretty clear what Charles Shultz was saying. The baby Jesus separates us from our fears when we’re in relationship with him.

The question is: Do we have baby Jesus in our scene, as it were — not just in a nativity scene, but in our lives throughout the year? Where is baby Jesus? Where is Jesus? Has he disappeared?

We’re speaking literally and metaphorically, of course. Is there room for Jesus in our life right now?

Before addressing that question, we might want to look at *what and who we have room for* — in general.

The obvious answer is that we have room *for our family, our spouse, our children and even extended family*. This is as it should be, of course. Many attending Christmas Eve services are attending as families. Christmas is many things to many different people, and the degree of religious sentiment attached to it varies considerably. Still, Christmas is often, if not usually, a time when the family comes together.

Yet, many of us work very hard and play hard during the year, and consequently, many families, children and spouses don't really feel the love.

Although the family is together at Christmas, it is subject to many modern stressors that can fracture family relationships. Family members — spouses, children, parents, grandparents — will get a Christmas present tonight or perhaps tomorrow morning. But presents don't equal *presence* and the former cannot be a substitute for the latter.

Most spouses and children would prefer to have us home for dinner, if possible.

This is the conflict working adults' face. We want and need to support our families, and this requires us to be away from the home.

So, while we have room in our life for family, sometimes the forces associated with our lifestyle make this difficult to manage well as much as we want to.

So we *make space for each other*. We make time for each other. We are a part of this scene we call family. Let's be there.

We also have room — not just for family — *but for many other things*. We have room for television and gaming, we have room for online surfing on Pinterest, Facebook and other sites. We have room for hobbies. We have room for eating out.

It's wonderful that we have room for all of these things, all of which can be and should be blessings in our lives.

But all of these things for which we have room need to be linked to a larger purpose and meaning. Who is that meaning? *Who* is the purpose?

Baby Jesus is the purpose and the meaning that separates us from our security blankets, our fears – even the fear of death.

Without room for Jesus, without that spiritual connection, without that longing to be in relationship with God through Jesus Christ, we are just doing fun things until we die and it is all over.

Truth is, having baby Jesus in the nativity scene brings great joy!

It is good news. It is “tidings of great joy!”

Finding room for Jesus is not a negative thing. It is not a somber, dread, dreary and dull thing.

With Jesus in our scene, our lives are suddenly purposeful. We have direction. We tag onto his values. We love what he loved. We value what he valued. We live for Someone and something outside of ourselves and that's a good thing.

Jesus came to Earth, after all, for a reason —

- He came to find those who are lost.
- He came to fill the emptiness.
- He came to point us to the way, the truth and the life.
- He came to reveal God.
- He came that we “may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).
- He came to go to the cross and to gift us with the eternal life of Easter morning.

There is an emptiness to living just for ourselves. It's no surprise or accident that when people retire and find that they have more discretionary time, an overwhelming number of them volunteer for an organization that helps others. During his pre-Civil War tour of the United States, the French historian and sociologist Alexis de Tocqueville observed that Americans love to be a part of civic organizations that work to improve their communities. In 1944, Arthur Schlesinger, historian and social critic, famously referred to America as a "nation of joiners."

Today, more than 60 million Americans do volunteer activities during any given year, and many of them are seniors. We really want to have something meaningful in our lives. Our Divinity ministries are dependent on our volunteers.

This is the gift that Jesus brings to us — the gift of meaning.

It's not that we're secularists who want nothing to do with Jesus.

That's not us.

The problem is that we've momentarily lost Jesus.

He's around here somewhere. You know that you put baby Jesus *somewhere* for safekeeping — someplace that you'd remember when it was time to retrieve him for an important occasion, like his birthday!

But sometimes we can't find him, can we? We're too accustomed to living without him. And when we need him — well, we just don't know what's become of him.

He's in a drawer or a closet or a long-forgotten corner somewhere. We'll find him someday, we're sure of it. But right now, we have no clue.

So life must go on. We construct our nativity scenes, our lives, and everything looks great, at least at first glance. But close inspection reveals something's off.

We're all looking at different things. We really aren't worshipping the Child who, in any case, is not in the manger. We all look preoccupied, as though we're wondering what we're doing and have lost our security blankets.

We're still suffering from post-traumatic shopping disorder.

It's all a show.

Many people simply lose baby Jesus. He's so easy to lose, after all. There's nothing malicious about it. People don't *intend* to lose Jesus. In fact, they probably made a commitment to keep Jesus, and put Jesus front and center where he belongs.

But he got lost. Somehow, we weren't paying attention. Perhaps he was set aside to make room for other elements of the scene, and the intention was to return him to his rightful place in our lives.

But it didn't happen.

However, it *can* happen. We can return Jesus to his rightful place — right now, as we prepare to listen and watch his coming to us in the manger.

Luke 2:1-20... <sup>1</sup>In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" <sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

<sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.