Every year at this time we hear the old familiar story about the night Christ was born.

How many times have we read this “old familiar story” from the Bible? How many Christmas pageants have we been to that depicted this “old familiar story?” How many sermons have we heard preached on this “old familiar story.”

Who among us here today can truthfully say he or she has never heard of Joseph and Mary and the baby Jesus........or Bethlehem...the star, the shepherds or the wise men?

Sometimes I wonder if our “familiarity” with this old, old story hasn’t bred a “calloused indifference” in the minds and hearts of many of us.
How do we find “freshness” in this old story we have heard hundreds of times?

We don’t do it by rewriting the story………or by adding new intriguing characters………or by putting some new interesting plot twist in the story.

We find “freshness” in this old familiar story by focusing on DETAILS. Details we have probably read or heard many times but have never really thought about before.

For just a few minutes I would like to draw your attention to specific detail in VERSE 12.

“This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

We forget how utterly unprepared the shepherds were to hear those words spoken to them by the angel.

“A Savior has been born!” “The Messiah has come!”
“The Lord from heaven is here! And in the little town of Bethlehem, no less.

But where in Bethlehem? How will they find Him? And how will they know for sure it is really Him? That is where VERSE 12 comes into the picture.

The angel said, “This will be a sign to you.” The Greek word for “sign” that Luke used in this verse refers to “a supernatural sign from God that NO ONE could possibly miss.” Like “parting the Red Sea” or “walking on water” or “raising someone from the dead.” God has intervened in human history many times through those kinds of “supernatural signs.”
When the angel said to the shepherds, “This will be a sign to you” you might expect the very next sentence to read something like..................

.....”The stars will spell out His name.”
....Or “A deep sounding voice from heaven will instruct you where to go.”
....Or “Look for a building that has a mysterious glow to it.”

But instead, the angel said, “This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

A baby wrapped in cloths ......lying in a manger?  What kind of a sign is that?  What’s so “supernatural” about a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger?

Luke 2:12 is telling us that the particular details of Christ’s birth are of great importance.  GOD could have chosen any number of ways to bring Christ into this world.

*He could have sent Him in all His glory, like the image of Christ we read about in Revelation 1.

*He could have sent Him here as a full-grown adult.

*He could have chosen to have Jesus born in the palace of a King or in the luxurious home of a wealthy couple.

But GOD who is Spirit chose to take on the “flesh” of a human being.  GOD who is bigger than the universe He created, chose to shrink Himself down to the size of a tiny little baby.  That is what is so “supernatural” about the SIGN the angels told the shepherds to look for.
What lessons do we learn from the manger?

First of all..........

I. The Manger Teaches Us About The Humanity of Jesus (v.12b)

v. 12b This will be a sign to you: **YOU WILL FIND A BABY.**

1. **“A baby”**------That’s all the Greek says. **“A baby”**
   **“An infant”, “a newborn child.”**

2. This tells us **CHRIST** came into this world the very same way **you and I came into this world.**

   While it is true that Christ was born of a virgin who miraculously conceived her child from the Holy Spirit of God, beyond the conception, everything else about Christ’s birth was just like ours.’

   For nine months Christ was **protected by the amniotic fluids** inside his mother’s womb.

   For nine months He **developed arms and legs, hands and feet.**

   For nine months He **received life giving nourishment** from his mother through an **umbilical cord** attached to his navel.

   And when Mary’s pregnancy had run its full cycle, Christ **came forth from his mother’s womb** just like you and I did on the day we were born.
3. To say that Christ was born as a baby brings us face to face with the beauty of the INCARNATION. For while Christ was full and truly God in every sense of the word .........he was at the same time fully and truly a human being in every sense of the word.

He was not half-God/ half-man as some have suggested. He was fully God/ and fully man.

He did not for one minute cease to be God by laying aside His heavenly glory. The Lord Jesus Christ was the God-man. He was two natures, miraculously joined together in one Person.

4. This Biblical truth is one most people in the world reject.

-While the JEWS hold Jesus in high esteem, they deny Christ’s deity.

-The Muslims believe Christ was a great prophet sent by Allah, but they vigorously deny He was the Son of God.

-The Hindus believe Jesus was a god (small “g”) among millions of other “gods.”

5. But to those of us who are Christians, Jesus Christ is our Savior, our Emmanuel, our God in the flesh who came into this world as a baby and dwelled among us for a time.

6. Yes, the manger teaches us about THE HUMANITY OF JESUS.
Secondly……

II. The Manger Teaches Us About The Helplessness of Jesus (v. 12b)

v. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby WRAPPED IN CLOTHS……

1. This is one of those “details” about the birth of Christ we have heard hundreds and hundreds of times and probably never given much thought to its significance.

   “You will find a baby wrapped in cloths” or as it says in the King James Version “swaddling clothes.”

So what’s so significant about that?

2. The birth of a child today is quite different today than it was in the time of Christ.

   Today most babies are born in hospitals inside of a room that is very sterile. Immediately upon exiting from their mother’s womb, the baby is taken into the hands of a doctor wearing a facial mask and sterile gloves. And after the doctor cuts the umbilical cord, he or she hands the baby to a nurse standing nearby who is also wearing a facial mask and sterile gloves.

   After cleaning the baby, the nurse will then hook all kinds of sophisticated equipment to the newborn child to monitor all of his or her vital signs.
3. Babies born in the time of Christ had none of those things. No hospitals. No sterile birthing rooms. No doctors or nurses attired in sterile clothing. And no sophisticated equipment to monitor the baby’s vital signs.

In those days babies were born in an environment that was dirty and dusty and full of life-threatening germs, with virtually no medical care available.

4. In those days newborn babies were wrapped in strips of cloth to protect them from the harsh elements. It wasn’t just to keep them warm, it was a matter of life and death.

Usually the mother would wrap the arms and legs separately, then wrap the torso until the baby looked like a little Egyptian mummy.

5. While this certainly restricted the movement of the baby, and probably sounds cruel and inhumane to us, we must remember in those days babies routinely died before their first birthday.

6. The fact that Christ was wrapped in “strips of cloth” or “swaddling clothes” is significant because it reveals His “helplessness.”

7. That “helplessness” as a baby in Bethlehem was a foreshadow of future events in the life of Christ.

*Thirty three years later, Christ would stand before Jewish authorities, bound and guarded as though He were a criminal.
Christ was “helpless” as he listened to one false accusation after another. He stood “helpless” as soldiers slapped Him and mocked Him and beat Him. And like a “sheep is dumb before her shearsers” Christ was “helplessly” led away to be crucified.

8. And after Christ died, Joseph of Arimathea buried him. And what did Joseph wrap the body in? Cloths.....He wrapped Jesus in cloths.

9. It is no coincidence that Christ left this life as He had entered it------*bound and helpless*.

Yes, **THE MANGER TEACHES US ABOUT THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST.** And **THE MANGER TEACHES US ABOUT THE HELPLESSNESS OF CHRIST.**

And thirdly......

**III. The Manger Teaches Us About The Humility of Jesus**

v. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a BABY (there’s the HUMANITY) **WRAPPED IN CLOTHS** (there’s the HELPLESSNESS) **LYING IN A MANGER.** (there’s the HUMILITY)

1. When we think of “a **manger**” probably the first image that comes to mind are the images we have seen depicted in Christmas plays down through the years.
2. Stables today are often very fancy. Many stables have air-conditioning to keep the horses cool in the summer and heat to keep them warm in the winter. Concrete floors and wood shavings provide a dry environment for the horse. And in nice stables, each stall has its own individual water line so water is readily available to each horse.

Horses boarded in modern-day stables have it as good, if not better than a lot of people.

3. The stable where Jesus was born was anything but fancy. In the first century, stables were often nothing more than a circle of stones around a hollowed-out cave in the side of a hill.

The manger was nothing more than a “feeding trough” made of stone or wood.

It was in this humble environment Jesus Christ was born.

4. Was this a foreshadow of the kind of place where Jesus would be buried thirty three years later just five miles up the road near Jerusalem? Personally, I believe so!

Illustration----In 1973 when I went to Israel, the highlight of the trip for me was stepping inside the tomb where Jesus was buried. If I am not mistaken, Israeli law no longer allows tourist to go inside the tomb.

Let me describe for you what I saw with my own eyes that day.

As I stood in line with my tour group to enter the tomb two at a time, the outside of the tomb looked like nothing more than a hollowed out cave in the side of a hill, just like a stable.
Once inside the tomb I saw what was left of the stone table Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had laid the lifeless body of Christ on the day they buried Him. Perhaps when all of that stone table was still in tact it resembled a “feeding trough” or a “manger.”

There was something so “simple” so “humble” about that place. Much like the humble place where the baby Jesus lay on the night he was born.

C O N C L U S I O N

The late Charles Haddon Spurgeon summarized the wonderful Christmas story this way and I will close:

“The scene at Bethlehem is one of utter simplicity: A mother……A father ……and a baby. Thus was “the word made flesh” to dwell among us.

What God does is both simple and clear. And the message to us today is simple and clear. Those who come to Christ in simple faith shall truly find peace.

Young women should come to Christ for Mary was a young woman who was God’s instrument for bringing Christ into the world.

Young men should come to Christ for Joseph was a young man who had great faith in God when doubts about Mary’s pregnancy might have turned him the other way.

Old women should come to Christ for Anna was an old woman who looked for the coming of the Messiah.

Old men should come to Christ for the aged Simeon waited for the consolation of Israel.
Working men and women should come to Christ for the Shepherds were hard-working men who made their living with their hands.

And the highly educated should come to Christ just as the Wise Men came from the east bearing gifts and bowing down to worship the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords.

The true message of Christmas is not complex at all. We were lost in our sins. We needed a Savior....God provided us with a Savior. Its that simple.

As for me, I have put all of my FAITH.....all of my HOPE.....and all of my TRUST in God’s Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. I am banking my whole eternity on Christ. And I know every Christian here today can say the same, AMEN!

If you are not a Christian. If you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I invite you to come to Him today, just as the Shepherds came to Him on the night He was born in Bethlehem long, long ago!

Won’t you come to Christ as we stand and sing our hymn of invitation?