

## Christmas 2012

### Theme: A House, a Stable or a Tent?

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Where was Jesus of Nazareth born, now not the country or the town, but the physical place?

Was it:

- A. A house.
- B. A stable or animal shelter
- C. A tent.
- D. All of the above

Now if you go to the 6:00 Christmas Vigil Mass when Matthew's Gospel is read, then you might not be able to answer since that Gospel doesn't say, however if you read on in that Gospel it seems to say in a house.

If you go to the Late Evening or Mid-night Christmas Mass when Luke's Gospel is read, then you would clearly Answer B, a stable or animal shelter.

But if you go to the Christmas Morning mass when John's Gospel is read, then you might Answer C, a tent.

And, for me and anyone else who goes to all three masses, the answer is D, all three.

Perhaps you are scratching your head a bit because under your tree at home and even here at the church is the traditional depiction of the Christmas story with the Christ child lying in a manger and the scene clearly spread in a stable or sometimes in cave where animals were kept.

This traditional scene is thanks to St. Francis of Assisi who selected the moving and graphic details of St. Luke's version of Christmas to

depict for the people of Greccio, Italy, on Christmas Eve of 1223 when he set up his first crèche in a cave outside their village.

Thus, Luke's version of Christmas came to capture the imagination, the songs and the art of Christians to this very day.

Matthew, however, told quite a different story; he never mentioned a trip to Bethlehem or a stable or shepherds.

Matthew simply wrote that **“Mary gave birth to a son whom Joseph named Jesus.”**

Ah, but then Matthew's story gets really interesting with details neither Luke nor anyone else told: the star and the Magi, jealous Herod, the Massacred Innocents of Bethlehem, the Flight into Egypt.

Matthew wrote that following a star, Magi, astrologers arrived from the east, from “afar,” seeking the newborn king of the Jews.

After an encounter with the current King of the Jews, bad King Herod, these Magi finally found Jesus with his mother, said Matthew, **“in the house,”** where they gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

So Luke in a stable or place for animals and Matthew in a house.

And finally in John's Gospel, we do not have story about Jesus' birth but a poem about the meaning of his birth, and in the course of that poem John wrote: **“and the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us.”**

The original Greek words for **“dwelt among us”** literally mean: **“pitched his tent among us.”**

There you have it: Jesus was born in a house, a stable, a tent or all three, depending on which Gospel you read or which mass you went to on Christmas!

So what is going on here?

First of all, each Gospel writer wanted to communicate his faith in Jesus Christ and what Jesus Christ means for the world.

The Gospel writers were not nearly as interested in the details of his life or birth, the history of the event.

Witness, for example, that Mark's Gospel tells us nothing at all about his birth.

Each Gospel writer, for his own reasons, emphasized and included various elements to proclaim to his hearers some truth about Jesus:

By bringing him to birth in a bare stable where he is visited by shepherds, the poorest of the poor, Luke situates Jesus from his birth among the poor, the outcast, the sinners among whom he will minister throughout his life.

When Matthew leads his strange visitors from afar, the Magi, right to the house of the newborn king of the Jews, he is proclaiming that Jesus is the new King whose light will lead all people from all nations on the face of the earth – not just the Jewish people -- to bring him their worship and gifts:

all people will be welcome in the new king's house.

And John, John proclaims the astounding Good News that the eternal Word of God has now and forever pitched his own tent here among us, in the midst of our joys and hopes, our anxieties and sorrows.

So the answer to our Christmas test question really is "all of the above."

Jesus Christ was born to be the Star of Bethlehem, the Light drawing all people from near and far into his house of peace and joy.

Jesus Christ was born among the poor and the outcast, the sinner and the forgotten to welcome everyone in the stable of God's mercy and compassion.

Jesus Christ was born to be God's own Word living where we live, not in some far off heaven, distant and aloof, but here, with us pitching his own tent in the midst of our often messy, confusing, sometimes sinful human campground.

So.....Come, all ye faithful.

Go, Tell It On A Mountain!

Joy to the world.

Glory to God in the highest.