

A white Christmas doesn't happen very often, so it's exciting to have one. We've seen photos of what Christmas is supposed to look like. After we've done all of our work to prepare for this day, it's nice to see Mother Nature do her part. It doesn't snow very much in Bethlehem, so it probably did not snow when Jesus was born. But there is something about snow that seems to fit Christmas. I think I know why, but first let me share with you a small point about the way Saint Luke tells the Christmas story in today's gospel.

Of the four evangelists, Luke is the best story-teller, and some of his stories are unique to his gospel: the annunciation of the angel Gabriel to Mary; the Good Samaritan; the Prodigal Son, the ten lepers; and Jesus forgiving the thief on the cross. At the birth of Jesus, we know shepherds and angels were there only because of Luke. Without him, we would not know these stories, and with his skill as a writer, they are beautifully told and easy to remember.

Because Luke is so good at stories, one part of the gospel for Christmas is puzzling: it's a little out of sequence. It's the part about the inn. Most of us have an image of Joseph and Mary going from house to house in Bethlehem, seeking lodging, having a lengthy conversation with an innkeeper, and eventually being banished to a cow shed where Mary gives birth and lays Jesus in a manger. So if you were telling this story, you would tell first about the inn, then about the shed, and then about the birth. But Luke doesn't do that. Listen again to how he tells this part of the story in only a few words: "Mary gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." The details are there, but they're backwards; Luke doesn't tell you about the inn until after Jesus is born. Why does he do this? One theory is that at the end of the gospel, Luke makes a very similar statement. After Jesus dies, a different Joseph, Joseph of Arimathea, takes his body off the cross. Then Luke says, "[Joseph] wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid." It sounds like, "She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." In one sentence, Luke tells you how, where, and why these events happened: The birth foreshadows the death.

Jesus took on our complete humanity. He was born into a poor family, and he died like an outcast. The word became flesh not among emperors and aristocrats, but among the poor and the despised, so that no one would think you had to be privileged in order to be saved. It doesn't matter if you are wealthy or poor, powerful or meek, healthy or infirm, hero or criminal, Jesus was born for you.

I think that's why we like a white Christmas. You don't have to be rich to have snow. You don't have to be powerful or healthy. It just comes to you. And you can see it; you see how it covers not just your house but everyone else's. It holds us all together like one family, even people we don't know. That is the mystery of Christmas: that a little child whom you could

see was born to show us what we have in common and to save us from our sins. He comes for each of us, no matter how we've sinned this year. He comes from heaven. Like snow.