

## The Advent W.A.I.T.: Invitation

Luke 2:1-16

Dec. 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020

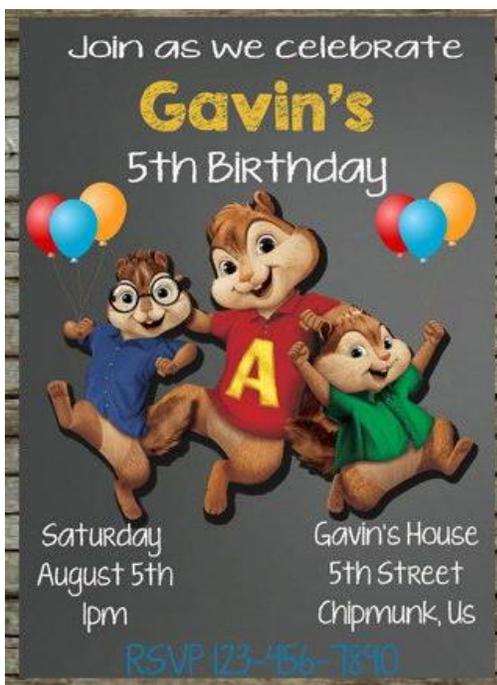
---

For the next few weeks, people all across the nation will be busy sending out Christmas Cards! My family sent out our Christmas cards this past Friday so you should be getting ours soon, and for those of you who sent "us" a card, I would like to say "thank you!"

Christmas Cards sure are fun to send & receive. Our family likes to go with the ones that have a family picture on the front. Other families like to write a card and include a letter w/a family update, but whether your Christmas card has pictures or letters or just has your signature, they're fun to send and receive this time of the year.

Well, this morning I'd like to start off by talking about a different kind of card that we often send & receive from others and those are Invitation Cards.

There are many types of Invitation Cards - let me show you just a few.



Here's a picture of an Invitation Card to Gavin's 5<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party. I didn't personally receive this invitation - I found this online and thought it was cute, but the invitation is for a little boy named Gavin who is going to turn 5 years old.

The party will take place on Saturday, Aug 5, at 1 pm afternoon and it will be held at Gavin's house (probably in his backyard) and it looks like they're going with a "Calvin & the Chipmunks" theme!

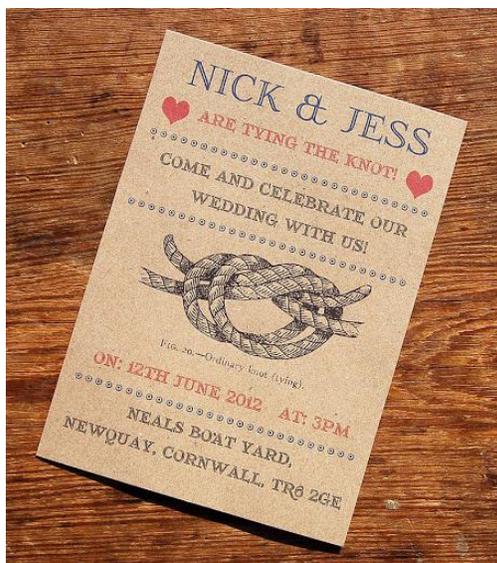
Birthday parties sure are fun to be

invited to, whether it's for a 5 year old boy or a 55 year old grown up. To celebrate another year - to sing them the Happy Birthday song, and if any of you are celebrating a birthday soon please make sure to invite me!

This next picture is an Invitation Card to a Graduation Ceremony. According to the invitation card, this one is for someone named "Seth."

He's graduating from High School, or maybe even the University - the invitation card doesn't say, but after the graduation ceremony looks like there's gonna be a party on Sat. June 8<sup>th</sup> from 2-4 pm.

Come and congratulate Seth on accomplishing this milestone. Come and check out his diploma! Come and wish him well on the next chapter of his life!



The last picture I'd like to show you is invitation card to someone's wedding.

A young couple by the names of "Nick & Jess" are cordially inviting you to witness the two of them exchange wedding vows!

Their invitation is kind of fun because on the cover - it's picture of two ropes, being tied together, which is an expression we used when two people get married - we say: they are tying the knot!

The wedding ceremony will take place on June 12<sup>th</sup>, at 3 pm, and it's going to take place at "Neal's Boat Yard" which continues the nautical theme, and so if you have a sailor's outfit or anything else that's appropriate, come to the "boat yard" and witness their union, as Nick & Jess exchange wedding vows and two of them become one.

Invitation Cards - whether it's an invitation to a 5-year old's birthday party or to a teenager who's about to graduate from high school, or to a young couple who's about to get married - sure are fun to receive!

To be invited means you're someone special! To be invited means they think you're important! And so try your best to make time in your schedules to be a part of those special moments in other people's lives!

Perhaps you've figured it out by now that the theme of this sermon is on the theme of "Invitations."

"Invitation" starts with the letter "I" which is the 3<sup>rd</sup> letter in the word "Wait," and that's the word I've been using as an acronym for this year's Advent sermon series.

Our scripture passage this morning is the story about an Invitation. It was the invitation to witness the greatest birthday of all; it was the invitation to witness the union between Spirit and flesh, and this morning I would like to extend the invitation to all of you as well.

*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria and everyone went to his own town to register.*

*So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem to the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.*

*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 room for them in the inn.*

*And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

*But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all on whom his favor rests."*

*When the angel had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger."*

## An Invitation to the Incarnation

Luke 2:1-16 is the passage that has inspired so many Christmas cards!



Here's a famous picture, drawn by Thomas Kinkadee, that you often see on some cards - it shows Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus sort of in the middle, surrounded by the shepherds to the right and the Magi to the left along with sheep and camels too!



Here's another famous nativity scene (I'm not sure who the author is) but this one has Angels floating above the manger with a lot more farm animals sheep and cattle, as well as a dove & a chicken too!

I love how these pictures give you the impression that things were very "calm" that night, but if you've ever met a couple who just had a baby, than you know that they are anything but "calm"!

So, most likely, Mary and Joseph wouldn't have had the mindset nor the time and energy to send out Invitation cards, and even if they did, what would you put on it?

And so, an Angel of the Lord took it upon himself (or was the angel a "She"?) to send out invitations on Mary & Joseph's behalf, but instead of sending them out to all the aunts and uncles and grandparents too, the Angel sent the Invitation to hand full of shepherds who were in a field nearby.

Here's what the Invitation said:

*"Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Son has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord! This will be a sign to you; you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

Did you know that the invitation was also a "musical invitation?" Kind of like those cards when you open up, - it plays a jingle! Because right after the Angel finished reading the invitation, there appeared a "heavenly choir" who quickly assembled in their places and belted out a song:

*Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth - Peace to all  
on whom his favor rests."*

And as soon as they finished that song, the angels packed up their instrument, turned their gaze towards heaven, and with a quick flap of their majestic/angelic wings they disappeared into the night sky!

What kind of Invitation was this?
-----------------------------------

Luke 2:1-16 tells the story of the invitation that was sent out when Jesus was born. But this was more than an invitation to celebrate the birth of a baby, (sort of like Gavin's) - it was more than an invitation that someone had reached a milestone (sort of like Seth's) and it was more than an

invitation to witness two people exchange their wedding vows (sort of like Nick & Jess) - this was an Invitation to witness the union between the Spirit and the flesh, which in Christian circles, we call the Incarnation!

This is what Christmas is about - it is about the Incarnation!

This is what the Angel was inviting the shepherds to witness - to witness the moment when God took on human flesh and came to us in the person of Jesus Christ!

Earlier when we lit the 3<sup>rd</sup> Advent Candle, you heard the words of John,

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it.*

Then he said in vs 14:

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."*

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. That is the Incarnation. God took on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. God became Immanuel - God with us - in the flesh!

This is the central message of Christmas - it's the Incarnation!

If we are to have any hope, if we are to express any joy, if we are to experience any peace, and if we are to demonstrate any love, it is because of this - God came down on Christmas day - God drew near in Jesus Christ, to be "with" us, to dwell "among" us, and "all" you have to do is simply accept this Invitation.

To say: "yes - *"I want to be a part of that event!"*

to say: "yes - *I'm not going to miss this for anything else in the world!"*

C.S. Lewis once said, "*The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation*" ... that God became a human being, that the spirit took on living flesh in the person of Jesus Christ and made a dwelling among us!

So this past week, as I was doing my sermon prep for this morning's message, I was reading up about "invitations," I came upon an interesting article related to our topic.

The article was from woman's magazine and in a particular section where readers can submit questions and ask the experts for advice. (The section is called "Reader's Dilemma.")

So there was this one reader who asked the following question.

***Reader's Dilemma: 'I Wasn't Invited to a Good Friend's Wedding, but a Friend who was Wants to Bring Me as a Guest.'***

So the question was: "*Can you go as someone's guest when you know the couple well - and they chose not to invite you originally?*"

Oooo, that's a doozy, isn't it?

I mean, if the Bride and Groom didn't have you on their original invitation list, would it be "ok" if you went as a guest with someone who was on that orig. list? (as their "+1?")

Well, the article went into all the issues surrounding the question, way more than we have time for this morning, but what struck me about that article was that it must feel terrible to be left out and not invited to a special event.

Jesus once told a parable, in Luke 14 about a "Great Banquet" that took place. We are not told what the reason or occasion was for, only that a certain man was preparing a banquet and invited many guests.

When the banquet was all ready and it was time for people to come, one by one, the invited guests came up w/excuses.

So the man told his servant to *"Go out into the city streets and alleys, to collect all who look like they need a square meal, all the misfits and homeless and wretched you can lay your hands on, and bring them here."*

When the servant replied that he had already done this and that there was still a lot of room at the table, the man said to him: *"Then go to the country roads. Whoever you find, drag them in! I want my house full!"*

This Christmas time, (this Advent season) is there anyone you know who might be feeling like they've been "left out" on the greatest invitation of all? If so, how can you extend an invitation to be a witness to the Incarnation?

There is a phrase that the church used to use not too long ago, it's the phrase: **"Incarnational Ministry."**

The meaning behind the words was that instead of doing ministry from afar or doing ministry from a distance, the idea was to embrace and engage in ministry - *"up close and personal."*

Just like God who came to be with us in the flesh, we are now to be Christ's body, His hands, His feet, His arms - out in the world.

The idea of "Incarnational Ministry" was well received in many circles, and it inspired many writers from St. Francis of Assisi to Teresa of Avila.

*"Christ has no body now but yours.  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours*

*Yours are the eyes through which  
he looks compassion on the world.*

*Yours are the feet with which  
he walks to do good.*

*Yours are the hands through which  
he blesses all the world.*

*Yours are the hands,  
yours are the feet,  
yours are the eyes,  
you are his body.*

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours."*

(that's from Teresa of Avila.)

The other saying from St. Francis goes: *"Preach the Gospel at all times  
and if necessary, use words."*

Both of these sayings reflect an Incarnational Ministry.

*"How can I show people who Jesus Christ is w/my life and w/my actions?"  
How can I invite others to participate in the mission of sharing the Gospel  
of Christ? And how can I help others to see God's Holy Spirit working in  
the world around us?*

If I can impress upon you this morning to explore these questions in your own life - that would be enough! Because it's one thing for someone to feel like they didn't get invited to a wedding, but it's another thing for them to feel like they weren't invited to be a part of the Incarnation!

Now going back to our passage from Luke ch. 2, there's this one little verse that I want to mention and that's verse 7.

It think it would help to read it again, actually starting from vs 6.

*"When [Mary and Joseph] were [in Bethlehem], 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 ROOM for them in the inn."*

Verse 7 in particular is the verse that inspired the opening lines of our 1<sup>st</sup> hymn:

*"Away in a manger, no crib for his bed,  
the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head."*

Verse 7 is also the verse that has inspired so many Christmas pageants, where two little children play Mary and Joseph, who walk up to a door, and are greeted by an innkeeper - but they ask for a room for the night, the innkeeper says something like: *"I'm sorry, we have no room."*

Whether that's accurate or not - I'll leave to the historians to argue. But can you imagine the greatest event of all (the Incarnation of Jesus Christ) was about to take place just a few doors down, but an Inn full of people missed out because there was no room.

Every invitation comes with the hopes that the recipient will say "Yes."

If I invite you to my birthday party - I hope you'll accept, and if I invite you to wedding ceremony - I hope you'll attend.

A few years ago, a old college buddy of mine (actually a fraternity brother) was finally getting married, and so he sent out invitations to everyone in the fraternity.

We were so happy for him that he finally met the love of his life, and I really wanted to attend but it was kind of "out of the way."

Truth was, the wedding ceremony was going to be in Thailand and he wasn't going to pay for any of us to fly there.

Well, I don't have the kind of money to fly to another country just to attend a wedding ceremony, and even if I did, it would have taken a day to get there and another day just to get back and I don't have that kind of time. And so - like many others - I conveyed my "regrets" for not being able to attend.

Someone posted this funny story online a few years ago.

*A friend of mine has 2 tickets to the 2017 Super Bowl.  
They are box seats, plus airfare & hotel accommodations.*

*He didn't realize when he bought them  
that this was the same day as his wedding - so he can't go.*

*If you're interested and want to go instead of him,  
the wedding ceremony will be at St. Peter's Church in NYC  
at 5 pm in the afternoon.*

*Her name is Louise and she'll be the one in the white dress!*

Well, I don't know if that was a true story, but the day of the Super Bowl, conflicted w/this guy's wedding date and so naturally we think the guy was giving up his football tickets, but the twist in the story is that he was giving up standing in his own wedding!

Of course, we all know that was the wrong decision, right?  
(just nod your head fellas!)

Imagine missing out on the biggest event of your life and the regret that would follow.

Invitations usually come with a phone number (or an email address) where you can reply. Sometimes on invitations, they use the words: "Regrets only"

According to Luke 2:7, the inn that Mary and Joseph showed up to in Bethlehem may have been at full capacity. There were no more rooms, there was no vacancy and what we are left to believe is that no one made any room for the young expecting couple, and no one made any time in their own busy schedules to attend this amazing event - the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Instead, they closed their doors and conveyed their regrets - "I'm sorry, there's no room."

The irony in all of this is that Jesus made time and Jesus made room, for everyone He met.

One time, Jesus offered to go all the way to a centurion's home, just to pray for his servant and to make him better.

Another time, Jesus was passing through a city - on his way to the next town, when He paused in the middle of the road to have a conversation with a Tax Collector sitting up in a tree.

He made time late at night to meet a Pharisee named Nicodemus to have a quiet conversation about salvation and being born again.

There was even this one time when the Disciples were acting like bouncers, trying to control the crowds and who got to see Jesus, when a group of parents tried to slip thru the velvet ropes and were stopped by the Disciples,

Jesus said to them:

*"Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."*

Jesus made time and space all throughout His ministry. For leaders, for outcasts, for the educated and for little children, which is ironic, because when Jesus Christ was born, no one took the time and no one made any room for Mary & Joseph to welcome their first child.

This Christmas time and this Advent season, you have all been invited to be a witness to the Incarnation again.

God in Jesus Christ desires to be re-born in our lives.  
God in Jesus Christ comes knocking on our doors.

And my prayers for you is that you will accept this invitation, with open arms and with open hearts.