

## Remember When? (Luke 2:1-7)

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/christmas-eve-service-remember-when/>

*“About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So, Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David’s town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket & laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.”<sup>1</sup>*

History is interested in writing down all the facts. But as we all know, history is not a single story. It’s more or less official ... until it’s not. Then what?

Then, there’s memory. That’s the story consisting of what people thought and felt while the facts were being established. It’s recalling what happened and why it’s important to treasure the story inside where our memory holds the story.

Memory is sometimes played as a game called, “remember when?” Let’s try it ... remember when you were outside playing in the snow with your dad and you threw a snowball that hit him smack in the face? *You don’t?* My son remembers that like it was the best, happiest moment in his life!

How about this? Remember a few summers ago when we had Vacation Bible School and the place was jam-packed with kids wearing cool T-shirts and they danced and sang their hearts out? Remember that?

Or, remember when you traveled to some other part of the country so you might be a part of a team sent to care for others in sharing food, or clothes, or who worked on rehabbing a building where others worshiped? Remember that? Remember the friendships you created both in our own group and among those we engaged in ministry?

Remember when in worship you came to some transforming moment about a crucial life-changing crossroads in your life? Remember that?

Often we read the Bible like it was history. Facts about this or that. Who said what? Who did what? But the Bible wants to be read like it was memory. How is it we remember something two or three thousand years ago as if it just happened?

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 2:1-7, Eugene Peterson, *The Message*

There's your memory, and there's my memory, and there's the memory we all hold in our minds. It's a bigger memory than just your memory and it becomes a collective memory of all of us. Take a look around at all these good folks and imagine that they also have their own memory, just like you.

Imagine all that memory together, yours, mine, theirs, and know that all that collective memory is powerful. Imagination is the key to all that power of remembrance.

So, let's play "Remember When?" with the story of the birth of Jesus. Remember when Mary and Joseph were traveling south to Bethlehem and when they got there, there was no place to stay? Remember that?

Remember the owner of the inn told them the only place on such a cold night was out in the stable and he told them they could sleep there in the hay?

Remember that? Remember when the baby was born, the angels sang in the heavens and their songs drew the shepherds who were out in the hills tending their sheep.

Remember when they showed up and found the baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in the feeding trough? Remember?

Remember it was a star that led them to find the family in an obscure little town called Bethlehem. Remember?

On Christmas Eve, we gather like we too have been drawn to the stable, seeking the promised one to remember this great story about how Jesus came into the world, an innocent little baby born in poverty to parents who were doing what they could to take care of themselves and this young boy who grew up to save the world.

"Remember when" is how we think of this story and all the other stories in the Bible about this one who was born in a stable surrounded by animals and completely out of sight to the important events of the day. Let's don't ever forget.

History will tell this story in one way, and our memories will shine a light on what really happened. We remember and know how this event continues to reverberate in our hearts. Amen.

We draw upon sacred memory every time we gather at the table of our Lord. There's the memory of the night in which this meal was first served. Jesus and the disciples were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover and as observant Jews, they booked a room and made arrangements to share the Passover meal together.

All good so far ... but Jesus added to this feast of remembrance and broke a loaf of unleavened bread and poured a cup of wine for them to all share. In that moment, he added a new layer of

meaning to the memory of the historic symbols of the bread and the wine. Jesus himself admonished them to *“do this in remembrance of me.”*

It’s interesting that the words and symbols took the next three centuries to be incorporated as a part of their communal worship. John Claypool says our time at the table of remembrance is like that moment in a shared meal he calls “the pass the biscuits” moment. Those not from the South need to trust me this is a crucial moment in any family gathering and the biscuits are a symbol that all is right with the world and that this is finally a sacred meal.

A narrative understanding of memory helps us tell our stories to one another as an expression of community. The mantra for this method is, “Gather the people, break the bread, tell the stories.”

Break the Bread. Pour the Cup. Give Thanks.

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