

ADDRESS TO THE CHRISTMAS MENAGERIE

Rev. Benjamin Broadbent
First Congregational Church of Colorado Springs
December 24, 2012
Christmas Eve

I.

Good evening to all of you. And thank you for gathering together on this cold winter's night. As the innkeeper at the Katlyma Hotel in Bethlehem, the only hotel in Bethlehem, I greet you, all of you, beasts and travelers, and I thank you and compliment you on your role in this evening's proceedings. As you know, I am fluent in cow, chicken, and sheep. I also speak enough star and angel to get by. And, of course I speak the dialects of most people, from lowly shepherds to the wisest of persons from east to west.

My friends, the cows, where are you cows? Ah yes, the cows, to you, I say, Moo, moo, moo, moo. Moo moo, moo moo. Well done tonight. You chewed your cud softly and silently, so as not to wake a baby. I have never heard such pleasant "lowing."

And to our dear chickens, to you, I say, well done and bock, bock, bock, bock, bock. Bock caaa! The rustling of your wings and the pecking of your beaks were a delight to behold on this beautiful and brisk night.

And to our sweet sheep, all of you, to you, I share a hearty, baa, baa, baa, baa. Your fluffiness and your soothing bleating provided a comfort to all this weary evening and I thank you for your kind service as blanket and pillow to many a tired traveler.

And to the shepherds, tis good to have you among us again this year, to come in from the field, and, especially, I thank you for not taking any of the sleeping space from the *paying* customers. We have appreciated your joyful presence among us and even your songs, as "colorful" as they tend to be.

And now, to the angels, a heavenly host of you, thank you for gracing this little corner of the earth with your most formidable presence. We thank you for appearing once again in the sky and singing to us about good news and great joy. As I mentioned, I only speak a few phrases of angel, so let me say to you, "Glo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-ria. In excelsis Deo..."

And to the stars which glow so brightly among us, we thank you for the good cheer you bring to our annual tradition. In your own language, I say to you, katinkle, katinkle, katinkley too, tinkley tinkley linkley loo. Here in Bethlehem, the only lights that last through the night are those of our beloved stars, so thank you, thank you, for bring your twinkling starlight to us.

And to you, wise travelers from the east, it is our great honor to entertain you here at the Katlyma Hotel, while we are a bit surprised that such as you would choose to join

here with us in this humble lodging. I speak a little bit of “pretension,” so I say to you, “Byar byar byar, byar byar byar byar byar.” We know that you are wise and rich, and that you have choice of wayfarer lodging, so we thank you for choosing Katalyma for all your lodging needs. Please visit us again next year when you are making your way to who knows where.

And that leaves the rest of you, travelers and sojourners, one and all. Show us your lights. Thank you.

II.

As you know, it has become a tradition here in Bethlehem at the Katalyma Hotel, for us to gather on this night each year to await the arrival of the Savior, one whom we call the Light of the World, Emmanuel, God with us, the one who is coming into the world, the Prince of Peace, good news for all people. We’ve been telling the story for a long time, holding out hope that this would be the year.

My role, of course is to say that there is no room at the Katalyma, but our little secret is that, indeed there is one room, we call it the “Royal Suite,” that is set aside for the Savior when he comes. The room was again made ready this year, a room fit for a king. Alas, it my duty to tell you, as the innkeeper of Bethlehem, that no great king has come to lodge at our inn this year. O, there were travelers, but none who matched the description of a great king. No displays of great wealth. No crowns, no expensive purple cloths, no signet rings. Everyone was on foot, a few brought donkeys, others camels, but no chariots, no retinues, no carrying couches. There were no heralds in the streets shouting out the name of the long-expected king. All was quiet and bright, but no big to do.

I hate to say it, but perhaps we have it wrong. Perhaps Bethlehem won’t be the place where the long-awaited One arrives. Perhaps it was just a fluke that King David himself was born here. After all, he was a *shepherd*, as rough and tumble as any Bethlehem shepherd. They spend most of their time with sheep in caves after all. No offense to the sheep. Baaa. And, as soon as King David grew up, he moved off to the city, to Jerusalem. That’s probably where the great king will show up, crunching with his army through its wide streets, stopping to make sacrifice at the temple before marching right up to the Roman fortress and telling those Romans to go back where they came from. Yeah, that’s probably it.

So, nice job cows. Moo.

Great show, chickens. Bock bock.

Superb performance, sheep. Baaa.

Shepherds. Way to go.

Angels. Glorious.

Stars. Brilliant as always. Katinkle.

Wise guys. Splendid. Byar byar.

Everyone else, thanks for stopping by the inn this year. Better luck next year right?

III.

What's that? What are you saying? No, you're mistaken. I was at the door all night. No one fitting the description of a king, of our savior, came to the door. I am a reliable witness.

I'm sorry cows, what is that? Moo? He was born in your stable tonight? That can't be right. How do you know it was him?
Because he smelled divine? Listen to yourselves.

Now chickens, what are you bock bocking about? The couple from Nazareth. How could that be? What proof do you have? The way they looked at him?

Okay, sheep, what do you have to say? Baa? They laid him in a manger, in the feeding trough. Preposterous. How do you know it wasn't just another baby? He had a glow about him? Impossible.

Shepherds, speak some sense to your sheep. What's that, the angels came to *you* in the field, singing about the birth of the Savior *tonight*. That's not in the script. Are you sure you weren't dreaming... or drinking?

Angels, what's up? You said something to make the Shepherds think that tonight was the night. And, by the way, why go sing to the shepherds. They don't exactly appreciate good choral music. Where did you get this news? From heaven itself? And what was the news? Tonight? In the city of David? Well, that's Bethlehem alright. Good news? Great joy? For all people? The Messiah? The Lord?

Stars, help me out. You shine down on all the earth. You saw everything that happened tonight. Back me up. No great king came to the door of my inn. What's that? No, I didn't see a star that was bigger than all the others. Look up? Where? Oh. Where did that star come from? From the east?

Well that's where the wise ones are from. What do you have to say? The star guided you here? A travelling star? That stopped over *our* town? That's why you're here? I can't believe my ears. I can't believe my eyes.

I can't believe what all of you are saying to me. Is this a joke? Are you pulling my leg?

You must be. After all, if the Child had been born tonight, then where is he? Oh, right here, among you? Did I have this wrong? Was he not to be a great and powerful king? But all of you are saying that here he is, among you, born of this man and this woman of Nazareth. (I hear they're not even married.) Cows, are you sure? Chickens? Sheep? Shepherds? Angels? Stars? Wise Ones? All of you are convinced that this is the one we've been waiting for? But this Child is so little, and so baby-like. No muscles, no weapons, no servants, no money, no place to lay his head. No place except the manger in the stable. Are you saying *this* is the Child?

IV.

I trust you, my friends. This is not what I expected. This is not what I was planning for. This is great news. Unexpected news. Great joy. For all the people. The Messiah. The Lord. Here, in Bethlehem.

Thank you, friends. Thank you, God. Thank you, mother and father of this child. Thank you, Holy Child, for the surprise of your birth, for being born *here*, among all of us, *this* year. Nothing will ever be the same again. Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth, good will to all.