

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Sermon Title: Speaking for the Men of the Christmas Story
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe

"Speaking for . . . the Men of Christmas" Rev. David Johnson Rowe

Business. Business. My job tonight is to represent the MEN of Christmas, the boys, the guys, who populated your original Christmas story. Now, trust me, I do understand what Christmas means to you. I look at your faces. I look around this beautiful church. I love your Christmas carols. This is an evening of wonder and hope and beauty, that's great! This is a time when you stretch yourselves to believe in miracles—go for it!

Christmas Eve is God's touching earth in joyful, happy ways. I love it! But you need to realize for us men it was business. For the good guys, for the bad guys, for the unpopular guys, it was business.

Shepherds. Wise Men. Innkeeper. King. Soldiers. Each one doing his job. Business. You know what I'm talking about. I look out here tonight. It's easy enough to see. You're all in business. Business is in your blood! You know about buying, selling, investing, paying bills, dealing with crooks and cheats, red tape, coming up with new ideas, making a profit, working hard, sweating. For us "men of Christmas," that was our world: business, good and bad.

Look at the innkeeper. Everybody makes fun of the poor innkeeper. Why? Because he ran out! That's business. You over stock or under stock or max out. The innkeeper maxed out. The guy owned an inn in Bethlehem, not exactly a hot tourist spot. It's not a Hilton or a Trump or Mohegan Sun. He is a small businessman in a small market, when all of a sudden a thousand people show up looking for a room! O.K., at first it looked like a great opportunity. Pack 'em in, raise the price, water down the wine, take bribes, make hay while the sun shines! Everyone does it! But by the time the Holy Family shows up, two things are true:

One, there is no more room. Period. And two, the innkeeper is exhausted. He walked them out to the backyard, pointed to the stable . . . and went back to work. Business. He had paying customers to take care of. No time for charity.

What about those Wise Men? Well, that's a business. People get paid to be wise! Astronomers. Stargazers. People whose job it was to wonder, to ponder, to think way outside the box. How do you think you got NASA? People looked up and wondered, and decided to follow as far as they could wonder. The Wise Men were the "Interstellar," the "Star Trek Enterprise," the NASA of 2,000 years ago.

And Shepherds? Blue-collar workers. Grunts. Campesinos. Minimum-wage earners. But pretty doggone important. No shepherds, no sheep. No sheep, no wool. No warmth. No food. So, how does your Christmas Carol go, "While shepherds watched their flocks by night all seated on the ground, the angel of the Lord came down and . . ." and, well, all heck broke loose! Honestly, that's the Christmas story for the MEN of Christmas. We were all doing our jobs, and all heck broke loose!

The innkeeper, maxed out, exhausted, suddenly had two more customers with an urgent need. Business is like that. Do you ever call the doctor when you're sick and say, "I'd like an appointment in a month"? You ever go to a restaurant and ask, "Give me a table in two hours"? How about the plumber, the electrician, the snowplow guy? In business, everything is urgent.

And the Wise Men—once they saw the star, they had a quick choice to make: stay put, or step out in faith to explore. Same with the shepherds. They had a front-row seat for the world's first "sound and light" show, the heavens exploded, angels singing . . . And they had a choice to make. Doubt . . . or faith. Play it safe . . . or go deep. Do nothing . . . or join in something amazing. Maybe there is a time for standing still, doing nothing. But Christmas wasn't made for "do-nothings."

Wait! I almost forgot one man, didn't I? Joseph. He won't be offended. He is forgotten most of the time. The one man who was in the Christmas story from beginning to end, and we almost forget him. Mary's husband, Jesus's dad. The Virgin birth sort of pushes him out, but it shouldn't. The Virgin birth flummoxes people today. It flummoxed people back then. Nobody can figure it out; that's what makes it a miracle. If you can figure it out, it's science. If you can't figure it out, it's faith.

Joseph had faith. He was also a businessman, the kind of businessman you Americans love. He was a small businessman and entrepreneur, a crafts-

man, a carpenter. And a dad. He was Jesus's dad. In fact, you might say he was the first person to make Christmas his business. He chose to believe, from beginning to end. He believed Mary. He believed angels. He believed God. He believed his gut. Come to think of it, that's the business of Christmas. Each of us doing our business the best we can.

I met a guy this morning. He asked me if I was a "practicing Jew or Christian." I said, "Hey, we are all practicing. Practice makes perfect, right?" That first Christmas all of us men—we were practicing hard. Christmas business. Good business.