

Sunday, December 1, 2019

Song of Mary 898 VU Ref 1

Romans 13:11-14

Luke 1:26-38

Who's in the Manger?

American Thanksgiving, Red Thursday, Black Friday, Sleep in Saturday and here we are—ready to begin the countdown to Christmas! Or are we? It hardly seems possible that we recently just took off our poppies and now we are putting on our 'holiday cheer' as we prepare to greet people with the blessings of the season including saying Merry Christmas! But here we are gathered together on this First Sunday of Advent and experiencing something different—not just waiting but truly taking the time to reflect on what this season- this 'most wonderful time of the year' is all about.

Some of you have put up Christmas decorations in this last week, or have begun to think about this as something to do soon but not sure when. Others will wait a week or two, and still others put up the tree after taking down Halloween decorations! But whatever your plan has been or will be about Christmas decorations, I hope you have at least one image of the nativity scene in your home. These scenes are interpreted by artists in so many different ways today, and yet what is essential is found in all of them. A barn, two parents, and a baby not in a bassinette, but a feed trough, a place where animals manger their food—a manger.

How many times have you gazed upon that manger scene and really not observed what is there. As we grow older we can recite the words from Luke 2 which tell the story but what do you really see? This scene does not depict a normal life scenario. As much as we call ourselves cultured and progressive, Mary and Joseph were not raised in barns but in loving homes. They did not plan to have the scene of Jesus' birth be a barn with animals peeking over their shoulders wondering what was going on. No doubt, Mary wanted to be at home with her mother and female friends with her as she gave birth to her baby. But no- she was in a different town, with the man who would become her husband but really did not know him well and the ones who supported her were strangers, the innkeeper and most likely his wife and family. What is it we see when we look at this scene? It is not pretty and quaint or cosy like a mountain cabin with a fireplace blazing as blizzards whirl around it. It is a barn out back behind the inn; it is filled with smelly animals, probably mice and spiders, birds flying in and out and now a human baby.

And also what do you see 'lying in a manger'? This scene we often put out on display or hang on a bough of the tree might cause us to be angry, bewildered, confused or even content. This is

because we might look on this scene and like Mary say, “To God I lift my soul in praise, in God my Saviour I rejoice”. What could Mary do? When the angel Gabriel told her she was to become pregnant by the Holy Spirit she humbly spoke and said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Or we could look on this scene and be angry with God! Why did he want this young woman carry and birth Jesus, what kind of reputation was he putting on this young faithful woman? Why didn’t the Son of God come to earth as a full grown man? Why have the Son of Man be a baby born in a barn. Shouldn’t this infant king have received some dignity with his beginnings? What would the world’s leaders or even the leaders of the local community think?

As we begin this Advent season we must remember those intangible gifts that came to Earth when Jesus was born. Hope is the first one. Mary had hoped to have her baby at home amongst family. But the first visitors who saw the baby were shepherds who had been outside and told about his birth. Had these shepherds hoped for something and this something happened? Were they afraid to visit Mary and Joseph? No because the messengers of God told them where to look—in a manger. They knew what a manger was; they knew they would be welcomed. They had hope which filled them with wonder, anticipation and joy. They had hope that whoever they saw, ‘lying in a manger’ was going to change their lives.

What do you see “lying in the manger”? Because we know Jesus’ life story as we have grown in faith through the years. Because we look to the world from a different perspective than that of 1st century Bethlehem, we see things in a new way. And what we see is this: God made a promise to send His Son to be our Saviour. This Son of God is also the Son of all humanity and yet there was no room for God in the world he had made. There was only a makeshift bed for God—the infant Jesus- to sleep in. God. But when we look at the face of that Baby Jesus—we look at the face of hope. Hope for all the world to see and experience. And over 2000 years later, we still need hope now more than ever.

For when we hear the UN Foundations Organizations voice their concerns over the key issues facing the world in late 2019 heading into 2020, we need hope to bring change. Climate change, sustainable development, ending poverty and financing the future are key problems right now. The effectiveness of UN negotiations and talks being discussed not only at the UN but being adapted by international assemblies or parliaments is detrimental for hope for the world. Human rights and gender equality are also key stumbling blocks and the humanitarian crisis of immigration, conflicts, and hunger all play key roles today. Yet what is it that can combat all these—hope? And where by faith may we find this hope? Yes, lying in the manger.

God of the Trinity- Father, Son and Spirit, Creator, Christ and Spirit is the One who heard the cries of His people throughout the centuries. And it is God who inspired the prophets to write about the one who is/was to come. Yet many did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah and so in order to fulfill His promise to care for all people, Jesus came to die and rise again.

In that little community of Bethlehem there was no place for a very pregnant woman and her husband to be, to stay but the barn outback. And so when Jesus was born, the world was decidedly hostile not in the case of wanting to rid the world of this child, but later on once those in leadership and power realized who he was. It was by mercy that Jesus endured all that could be thrown at Him. Jesus the infant was most vulnerable in the manger- a helpless infant, yet he was loved, he brought hope to his parents and for all who met him. For Mary knew that this baby “would be great, called the Son of the Most High and that the Lord God would give to him the throne of his ancestor David. And that his kingdom would never end.” Mary never questioned the angel about this but by faith we believe Mary had enduring hope for she knew that her baby was.

As we begin Advent we are each in need of finding Jesus once again. We won't find him wrapped up in a bow but we will experience his Spirit if we look to that scene captured so long ago and displayed in many ways. A baby in a manger. This is the Jesus Christ the one who was born to live, to die and rise again for you.

Let us pray:

Holy God of hope and love, we praise you for who you are. Help us to see Jesus again for the first time. Help us to know him and receive the gift of hope he offers as we begin this Advent season. Help us to see Him lying in the manger, knowing that he is the One born to save us all. Hear these prayers of hope we have in this moment. SILENCE> Amen.