

Monday, December 24, 2018

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 2:1-20

Jesus is born!!

There was a little boy who was sent to bed early on Christmas Eve- anxious as he was he knew he needed to share in his bedtime prayers. He started off well but then his parents heard him say, "forgive us our Christmases as we forgive those who Christmas against us." Had he not heard 'trespass' properly or was he intentional about the words he spoke? Maybe he was observant of all the things around him- boisterous excitement getting in the way of hectic preparations being completed by his parents, or did they just want him out of the way on one of the most exciting evenings of the year? Or maybe this prayer leads us to what we are doing here tonight.

We gather here tonight to praise God for his gift to us in Jesus Christ. Christmas can be so wonderful and magical, spiritual and enlightening but it can also be so terrible as we get caught up in a whirlwind trying to do it all. We want this holy night to be perfect- like those wonderful television specials where all are happy in the end, or like those Christmas movies where love that is found is perfect. But as W.H. Auden suggested, we are so materially bound, that we fail to see "the actual vision," and only find a few minutes to really entertain it as "an agreeable possibility."

We gather here tonight - some of us content, happy, relaxed - but all too many of us tired, stressed, guilty, anxious. Yes, we come here tonight restless, because despite all our preparation, we still don't know what we are preparing for - why it is that in the deepest part of who we are, there is an emptiness and a hunger.

We come to church, some of us settled in familiar pews, others of us feeling a bit awkward because let's just say- it's been a while and yet there is something familiar about this place as well. Not only are there people you recognize but the music has been able to carry you back to a time in your life where there was contentment and you remember Christmas celebrations in the past where maybe you were a sheep, a shepherd, maybe you were an angel or even Mary or Joseph and in this memory you remember and know why you are here tonight.—Jesus was born for you. And coming to hear this story again is like coming home and its comforting, familiar and of course there is love.

And yes we love the story—filled with fear, anxiety, trust, hope and love. The fear Mary must have experienced travelling to an unfamiliar town, 9 months pregnant with a man she was to marry yet

not fully knowing who he was and how he would care for her. The anxiety in Joseph's heart as he wanted to make Mary as comfortable as possible because it was a long journey and she had shared her pains with him. And yet each innkeeper he spoke with said no room. He was desperate- he needed someplace and even accepted the stable where guests had housed their animals for the night. Sure the innkeeper and his family attended to cleaning it up a little. But would this be all right for Mary. O how much he wanted to impress Mary.

Yet they trusted each other and mostly they trusted God. Joseph was all set to leave Mary when he learned she was pregnant. But the angel told him to trust her as she was a good woman faithful to God and carrying the promised messiah. Mary trusted Joseph and knew that he loved her and would after her needs not only as they travelled to Bethlehem but in their life together.

And there was hope- they hoped to live a long and caring life together. A life filled with dreams, wishes and of course children and family. But when God's angels told them of the baby who was to be born, their dreams were set aside for a while. God's Son came first. So in that stable the baby was born.

In the chaos of registering citizens of the area, a new person was added to the number. Jesus son of Joseph and Mary. And in that stable a temporary home was made for this holy family- Something familiar about the stable was there- hay, horses, donkeys, camels, cows. Water bowls and feed troughs and yet there was more. A light shone that night ever brightly in the sky. Jesus was born and wrapped in swaddling clothes—whatever Mary had packed for the trip and she held him, nursed him, and when she rested, Joseph put him in a bed of hay. Jesus was at home with Mary and Joseph and he was safe, and he was loved.

We write in our bulletin liturgies—"welcome home to Glenwood Church" because this place can be like home- familiar, caring people who have a common goal. Tonight when as we sing the carols sung for over 2000 years, anticipate sharing in the light of Christ and spreading it around to all present, and remember that time and place when God stepped down from heaven and became human, it is real. We are a family of Jesus Christ and because we believe that Jesus came to fulfil his purpose as messiah or the one who would change the course of human history, or even the one who lives in your heart, we are home- here together.

But like being at home.. we also have to go out into the world again. The shepherds saw the angels in the sky and they decided to go to see the baby in the stable. They were overwhelmed with joy

and praised God. And after all this- angels, stable, seeing the baby with his parents, they went back as we too must go back into the world. They were forever changed.

The shepherds left the stable and they were so filled with joy they were laughing, and leaping and praising God, They were joyful and rejoicing in their hearts and singing praise to God. They had to tell everyone they met—as the sheep they cared for would not care. The shepherds probably woke up the neighbourhood and many of those people would not have cared. Even though this baby was born down the street, many of the townspeople would not have understood about angels and stars or the significance of this child. But the shepherds did

The shepherds went back into the fields singing praises to God. They went back and talked about what they had seen, heard and experienced. They were blessed at Bethlehem that night. But what about your Bethlehem blessing? Have you received this holy night of Jesus' birth? Will the familiarity of the Christmas story in your mind, close your heart to the Spirit which is trying to speak to you? Or will you hear the good news and rejoice like the shepherds? Will you forget what God's Spirit has done to you and with you? Will you forget the reason why we are here in this familiar place- is because of Jesus?

Will you remember Mary and Joseph- who pondered and reflected and prayed that God would lead their lives now that Jesus was born? They probably did not forget the shepherds' visit as they heard them singing as they left the town. Will you forget the shepherds' praises to God for being blessed Or will you remember this story and this moment when God's Spirit has spoken to you- as you gaze on the faces of other people who are here and truly believe in his gift to us? And all will be familiar yet new at the same time? We gather to honour Christ's birth into human history and acknowledge our faith in him as the promised One of God who came to save his people. We also realize that it is Jesus who is the true light which will guide us in all of life. Christ is our light-our hope, peace, joy and love. Jesus is born. It is now up to us to tell others—with thanksgiving, with joy and with experience that all is familiar yet new because Jesus has changed us through his birth, his life on earth and through his death and resurrection.

Rejoice and be glad for this is Christ the King. The Son of Mary and Joseph and the one for whom angels sang and shepherds praised. And this is your Saviour and Lord who came to us as an infant and loves us unconditionally. Thanks be to God.