

FRIDAY, December 24, 2021 Christmas Eve "He is Born for Us- are we Ready?"

Isaiah 9:2-7 Luke 2:8-20

This is Christmas Eve, the night when children can hardly sleep with excitement of Santa's visit to their home. And parents wonder about whether all is ready to celebrate this special day with family. People around the world anticipate the perfect Christmas experience and yet we know that there is no such thing. Even the latest Hallmark Christmas movies have started to state this when detours occur, new people enter the characters' lives and snow storms block roads home. The perfect Christmas is what has been painted on Christmas cards as the fulfillment of hopes and dreams. But the reality is that not everyone's experience of Christmas is a snow white landscape with trees perfectly decorated outside or inside.

When we consider what is happening in our world tonight we might wonder, will Christ be born in us again? There are many people who will celebrate Christmas with an empty space at the table- because of the death of a loved one this past year or their loved one is sick and in hospital, or because only 10 people should be gathering socially for yet another Christmas Day.

We might also reflect upon the many people whose homes have been destroyed this past year—through fires, mudslides, tornadoes, gas explosions and flooding. Where are they spending Christmas? One cartoon published in the Windsor Star is Agnes. Agnes chronicles the adventures of an elementary school-aged girl living in an Ohio trailer park called "The People's Court" with her kind yet weary grandmother. Agnes is poor and not what one would consider a classical beauty. She is a dreamer and schemer with a limitless imagination and is full of ambition but all of these are constantly brought down to Earth by her limited resources and social standing. In the current story line, Agnes' trailer park home is burned and she and Grandma are put into a temporary shelter of a not so clean motel. Agnes, ever optimistic, asks her Grandma if this room will be where they spend Christmas. Grandma replies, "Yes." Agnes always the optimist remarks, "It's Ok, Grandma! It's mostly clean and the beds look comfy!" Grandma states, "Don't sit on that until I spray it." But she responds, "These sheets look like beautiful watercolour." Grandma's answers, "I think they're supposed to be white."

How many people across the country will be experiencing Christmas like Grandma and Agnes in hotel rooms or even temporary shelters because of situations that occurred in these last twelve months? These situations have lead many to temporary housing or others seeking food assistance and support to even attempt a celebration of some sort. The rise in homelessness and support for food banks is high across the country because of many

influences, but one thing is certain everyone has to do more to help others and to bring a renewed sense of hope.

Yet on Christmas Eve we do not want to hear about homelessness, poverty and the need for food because it is the time to celebrate Jesus' birth. Yet the question to consider is, can we celebrate Jesus' birth without considering the circumstances into which God's Son, was born?

Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem because of a census. They needed to go to Joseph's hometown and register. We do not know the circumstances as to why Joseph no longer lived in Bethlehem but because he was raised there, he and his wife needed to travel to do as the government leaders asked. Joseph's betrothed or intended wife was pregnant and so for Mary to travel any distance it would have been uncomfortable. Every few kilometres she would have needed to get off of the donkey, stretch and just relax a little bit. It was a long journey and riding on the donkey was not a smooth ride at all.

They arrive in the town and Joseph knows that Mary needs freshening up, food and rest. He goes from one of the few inns in town to another and receives the same answer. No vacancy.

But at one place the innkeeper sees this young teenage woman who is desperate to stop moving from place to place. There is room in the stable out behind the inn. Provision is made amongst the animals belonging to the other guests. Food and water are given to the donkey as well as Mary and Joseph. Mary lies down on a makeshift bed of blankets and hay; she falls asleep. But then suddenly labour pains begin. Joseph is unsure what to do and gets support from women staying in the inn. Mary's pain continues into the evening until the cry of a baby is heard, late in the night. And when this baby cries, a bright star appears and now the world now marks time and connections are made around the world.

Mary is now wide awake and she stares deeply into the darkness of the stable. The labour pain has been eclipsed by wonder. She looks into the face of her newborn son and cannot take her eyes off of him. Mary knows that she is holding the Son of God. It is at this point in our human history, the human being who best understands who God is and what he is doing is a teenage girl in a smelly stable with a man whom she will call husband. She is without a home, no food, in a town where she knows no one and she has just given birth to a baby. His face is red and prune like and his cry though strong and healthy, is still the helpless and piercing

cry of a baby. This baby is absolutely dependent upon Mary for his well being. She holds him, nurses him, and the baby sleeps.

Somehow there is holiness in the filth of cow donkey and sheep manure. A young family is sheltered in a barn and a baby is born. The Son of God has entered the world on the floor of a stable, through the womb of a teenager and in the presence of a carpenter. For some reason they both know that this baby is not just a baby, but God's Son. Mary realizes that she is holding the Promised One of God. And she remembers the words of the angel. "His kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:33).

But this is not the end of the story. In just a short while, shepherds who have been living outside watching their sheep come to the stable to see the baby. Mary has no idea who these people are nor how they ended up looking at her son. But they tell her that a multitude of messengers from God-angels- told them about the baby boy and that he would be the Saviour. They are amazed to see the Son of God in a feed trough and stable but nonetheless they are so excited as they leave town, they wake up the neighbourhood with their songs of joy!

Mary realizes anew that she is holding the Promised One of God and that this baby will not be hers forever. He is born to save others from sin. But she does not know how, or when or what will befall him. She only knows that her task is to raise this boy as a human follower of God with faith abounding.

In spite of being in a barn, without food and alone in this little town, the community supports Mary and Joseph and the baby. Mary knows that she could not travel back to her home town with a newborn baby and so they seek a place to live.

As we reflect on this holiest of nights- and celebrate Jesus' birth we need to reflect on Mary as a new mother looking for the best for her son. His birth was not a great start but with each day, Mary is determined to see his purpose fulfilled.

While we struggle with different issues, influences and problems focusing on covid19 pandemic and the number of people now testing positive on the rise again let us remember why we take the time, make the effort and even put energy into what we call Christmas. Christ the Saviour is born. Christ the saviour is born. It is a night of joy because a baby came safely into human history. This baby is the beloved child of God, promised hundreds of years ago to become the one who would save those who would believe. For over two thousand years Jesus'

story has been told and retold and the wonder Mary had that night in the stable has been shared by millions of people in our human history.

Many children today know about Santa Claus and how he brings gifts to good children, but Santa's story comes to us from St. Nicholas was a man of faith who served as a Christian bishop. He helped those in need and after his death, the legend of his generosity grew. St. Nicholas believed in Jesus and served his church helping others as he could. His gift giving is part of the reason we share gifts with others close to us, we help those in need or the organizations and groups which offer comfort and encouragement like the church.

Mary knew that her baby would be somebody special. She had been asked to bear the Promised child of God for the sake of all people. She was not ready to give birth in a barn, but she dealt with it. She was not ready to receive visitors so soon after having the baby but she welcomed the shepherds. She was not ready to stay in Bethlehem longer than needed but she and Joseph did as she needed to rest and look after the baby. But in spite of not being ready, she gave birth, nurtured this baby, loved him as part of her family and taught him about God's love.

We often ask each other if we are ready for Christmas. No one is really ready with all the to do lists leading to the time of a special meal, but the question that is most important tonight is are you ready to open your heart and mind to receive the baby born for you? For this baby does not remain an infant but grows to become the one who dies on the cross for all who would believe. He is the One whom God promised would save His people from sin and death. He is the one who has received our loved ones in heaven where they are rejoicing with him as we miss them and mourn. He is also the One who is in the hearts of all believers because we have confessed our faith in Him, and showed our love for him. Are you ready to receive the Christ, born for you tonight?

Mary endured much at the time of Jesus' birth. Jesus endured much at the time of his death. But we are the ones who benefit because of his Resurrection. Are we willing to receive the baby at the manger, the Christ of the cross and the Risen Christ? This is Jesus. The one whom we remember is born this night in a stable and lives as the resurrected Saviour of all. He is the One born to save us; redeem us and calls us to tell others of his love, joy, peace and hope.

As we reflect on the many who are hurting, sick, alone, dying, homeless, hungry and cold this night, let us remember that it is in Christ that we have hope. Through him In Christ

alone, we receive God's gift of love and righteousness. It is through him we are reconciled with God and we will live forever more. Are we ready to receive Jesus, the Baby born for us?

Let us pray:

God of grace, we praise you for Jesus born this night amidst many struggles for basic needs. Yet he was loved, nurtured and cared for by Mary and Joseph. And through his teaching we learn to love others. Help us this night to remember Jesus not only as the baby in the manger, but our Risen Saviour. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.