

Sunday, January 8, 2017

Isaiah 42:1-9

Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 2:1-3, 9-12

Matthew 3:13-17

Sharing the Good News of Jesus

Happy New Year, Everyone! May God's blessings be upon you each of you in 2017! As we gather this morning we might just want to take a deep breath and then let it out. Winter is now here and since the regular routine of school and activities begins again tomorrow, we might just need to stop and breathe to calm ourselves down before the winter schedule of activities starts.

We celebrated Jesus' birth on Christmas and we recognize Epiphany on January 6 as the day when the Wise Men, the Magi- those learned men from the East offered gifts to the child Jesus in the home where he and his parents Mary and Joseph were now living. Since that star first appeared on the night Jesus was born, they had traveled from the east and had contacted King Herod to find the infant and eventually they found Jesus. There they worshiped him and bowed down. They presented him with gifts fit for a king and one who would die. These wise educated astronomers who studied the sacred texts of others, knew that the messiah God had promised was before them and they also knew that he would die for the sake of others. They did not trust Herod the king and so began their journey home by a different route.

This is what is known as the story of Epiphany when God reveals His Son Jesus and he is recognized as the Messiah. The Wise Men knew his purpose, Mary and Joseph knew that their son was the Christ and they had protected him. But now Jesus was being introduced by God as the one who would save the faithful. This is the good news of Jesus which is now being shared.

But what occurs next is that Joseph, Mary and Jesus live in Egypt until the end of King Herod's reign. They return to Nazareth where Joseph sets up his carpentry shop and this is where Jesus grows up. There is little information about his growing up years except for when he is forgotten in the temple at age 12 and he is found teaching the elders in the synagogue. But God knew. God had put in place how Jesus was to begin his ministry; how John the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth was to prepare the people for Jesus' teaching and ministry and God had also been preparing Jesus to fulfill his purpose on earth.

For many of us, we'd like to stay with the story of Jesus in the manger. It is comforting it is holy and sacred and wonderful- this is why we celebrate Christmas in such a big way. Yet just like tomorrow, we have to keep going into the new year and to see and experience all that will challenge and excite us, as well as what will call us to become closer to Jesus as well as who we are in ministry together. God knows what the future brings but the question we need to ask is whether we are ready to share the good news of Jesus into this New Year? Or whether we are ready to do so.

How many of you use a remote control when watching television? Maybe you need two or three to do so effectively? But what do you need them for? To change channels or to watch 2 or 3 programs at once. Maybe you lie to move past commercials, or mute the commercials. Or if you are watching a movie you can pause, reverse or even fast forward through to the part you want to see. As we hear the wonderful story of Jesus receiving gifts from the Wise Men we must also prepare ourselves to fast forward our thinking about Jesus. The story of his birth is beautiful sacred holy but we cannot leave him in the manger because he was born to fulfill God's promise of a saviour.

Jesus grows up strong wise and his abilities astonish many. But as Isaiah stated in ch.42 God will put His Spirit on Him and he will bring justice to the nations. God will be the one who will put in place Jesus as the promised saviour. Jesus' purpose will be to: open eyes of the blind, free captives from prison, to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. And God will reveal Jesus as His Son so that those who were alive when Jesus walked the earth would know him and follow him.

We must also be prepared to hear again the story of John the Baptist who has also grown up and been prepared to do his task of preparing people for Jesus. He went into the Desert of Judean and said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." John lived off the land and people went out to him from Jerusalem. They listened to his teachings and they responded by being baptized.

These people had made an effort to hear John speak by the Jordan River. News had spread that there was one who dressed a little odd, but whose words changed lives. He also taught a new way of self-giving and did something different to show others that they believed in God who made promises and turned lives around. The people were baptized as a symbol of their repentance and forgiveness. And they were given opportunity to live again in the name of God.

But what about you who might have heard this story before—Jesus was born, to live, to die and rise again. Have you heard about Jesus?

John baptised Jesus and God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power and then he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil because God was with him.

Peter describes what occurred to Jesus— they killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him from the death and caused him to be seen. He was seen by witnesses whom God had with him after he rose from the dead. Jesus commanded them to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

Wow what a way to be introduced—Jesus anointed with the Holy Spirit, killed raised to life and is the one who told Peter to tell others about him.

This is Jesus. The infant who was recognized as King of the Jews; anointed by the Holy Spirit and crucified. This is Jesus. Are you willing to share the Good News of Jesus with others who believe?

As we hear Jesus' story shared by Peter, as we understand why the magi presented those gifts to the child, and even what Isaiah prophesied about hundreds of years before his birth—why do we question whether Jesus is the messiah—we should only receive and believe in him and then share this good news with others.

As we begin 2017 we share in a tradition first started by John Wesley in 1747, a Covenanting service of commitment between individuals and God; between Jesus and people; all working together as the Spirit moves us and calls us to be one with each other. The covenant is a renewal of our believing in Jesus and invites us to state that we live for God. Today we renew this covenant. Yes we have been faithful followers of Jesus throughout our lives, even until the closing hours of 2016 but today we have fast forwarded the story of Jesus—from baby in a manger to the Risen Christ all for the sake of knowing Jesus for ourselves. We belong to Jesus and He knows us and loves us. Come let us share the good news because Jesus is the light of the world.