

Saturday, December 24, 2022 Christmas Eve

“Joy to the World”

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

“Joy to the World the Lord is come; Let earth Receive her King!” Is the opening line of the most published Christmas hymn in North America. Written by Isaac Watts in 1719 it is an interpretation of Psalm 98 which celebrates the wonder of the Second Coming of Christ. But for many today, it is the hymn which signifies the ultimate statement of faith and hope that calls us to be filled with deep joy!

Throughout Advent we have been focusing on our desire for joy in our lives. The joy that Jesus alone can and does give to us all if we believe in God’s promised Messiah coming to us in the infant born in a stable. As you have listened to the story from prophecy to Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth has your heart been opened to hear again Jesus humble beginnings? Just where is this joy for you this holy night?

Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem in order that they would be properly registered under Caesar’s ruling. This poor couple had a duty to perform by leaving their home town and going to Bethlehem. With Mary’s pending due date to birth her baby they must have been anxious about the need for all of this. We don’t know if they appealed the need to file their registration until after the birth of the baby as many would have today. But they knew that this was the journey they had to take. They probably had a lot of things on their minds as they traveled too- what to do, where to do and where to stay. Yes this was Joseph’s hometown, but he had not known anyone nor could he just show up at a relative’s door with Mary. But they knew a few things would happen- the baby was to be born a boy and they knew what his name would be Jesus or Yeshua- meaning the Lord saves. He would also be called the Son of the Most High, but not every one knew this about this baby. Mary and Joseph did not tell everyone about this baby to be born being of the Spirit. And they probably wondered how God would make it know that the messiah would be born.

The incarnation of Jesus is unique—today we see photos and instant messages by phone or facebook. Yet back then communication was slow- anticipating something out of the

ordinary just did not occur because life was difficult and filled with hard work and not always did people fully dream or believe that God was really up to something so big!

Not finding a proper hotel room in which to stay, Joseph knew Mary needed to rest. She probably told him quite calmly that she was having pains and would need a place to lie down and if it was time, to give birth. So Joseph does what he can under the circumstances- agrees to staying where it would be warm- a barn with animals used for transportation. A stable, old time parking lot and the place where Mary would deliver her baby. Jesus is born. God becomes human through Christ Jesus, He is the incarnation of God given to us to love and care for. This baby would grow to change the world and its history, But in those moments- Mary and Joseph rested knowing that their baby would sleep soundly in the feed trough. Jesus was born in the intense, private moment that birth is. Afterwards they rest watching Jesus now wrapped in cloths and sleeping in the manger. This is the beginning of their lives being changed. Jesus is with them.

While this is going on, shepherds are doing their job, overseeing their flocks. Working hard into the night and ensuring that the boss' sheep are safe. What they think is a regular night, becomes a spectacle with angels both shouting and singing that telling them what has happened. Fearful at first, they decide to go to the place where the baby lay. They know they see the place as the star has lead them. They approach the gate of the stable and maybe one of them clears his throat—and shuffle inside on the straw on the floor. Mary is startled at first to see strangers in her midst but awakes fully. Mary or Joseph might have asks, “How did you know about us? Jesus is only a few hours on this earth. How did you hear?”

When the shepherds tell their incredible story the quietness of the barn is gone—they explain the angels' songs. They then tell the story of why they are here. The angel told them that this Child was God's Saviour, the promised Messiah. Mary and Joseph aren't too surprised by angel stories—they know because they have experienced these glorious messengers in their life. IT is on this level that the shepherds, Mary and Joseph may connect. Perhaps even one of the shepherds ask to hold the baby. They would know how to hold a lamb at a tender age. Maybe the Lamb of God would be held and handled by those who care for lambs. They might

have lingered for a while as they sit with the parents and baby. They are in awe and yet they know that as dawn comes they know they must go. The town of Bethlehem would soon awaken. The busyness of David's descendants from other towns would drift in the streets and the markets would be active again. It was morning and the town was just waking up with activity. People might have been puzzled to see shepherds out and about in town in the early hours of the morning. Normally they would be out in the fields ensuring that the sheep were safe. But these particular shepherds couldn't keep their news a secret any longer. They were bursting with joy—a baby, born in the stable down the road, was sleeping in a manger—Jesus, the messiah= he is born! Anyone trying to understand them would be caught up in their joy and excitement. People wanted to hear and their story was told over and over again.

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. The joy that the shepherds experienced was now being shared amongst the people of Bethlehem. The Messiah was born! God fulfilled his promise—a messiah was to be given and this was joyful news.

As we celebrate the Joy of Christmas that is Jesus' birth this night, let us get excited! "For unto us is born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord." God is with us Emmanuel! Jesus is the incarnation, the word made flesh born of Mary to live a human life. He is the One who comes to earth for our sake and out of deep love from God. He is the one who saves us and enables us to be reconciled with God in faith and hope.

Tonight we celebrate Jesus birth and give thanks to God for fulfilling his promise. Jesus is born and joy has entered the world. Joy also filled the hearts of Mary, Joseph and the shepherds and they cannot hold it in. What about you? How joyful are you? What are you going to do about the joy that comes in Jesus this night? How will you share it?

As we rejoice and give thanks to God for his gift to us in Jesus let us come to Christ's table and remember him. We remember that Jesus came as an infant and yet we are called to remember him as we eat and drink his holy meal. We give thanks that he calls us into

reconciliation and forgives us. Let us rejoice and be filled with the joy that Jesus brings! Joy to the world for Christ rules the world with truth and grace!

PRAYER

Holy God of grace and love, we praise you and we are grateful that Jesus is born for us. This child is the King of kings and the One through whom we receive salvation and hope. God we praise you and are grateful to you for the joy we experience in Jesus' birth. Bless us O God as we praise your name and our hearts are filled with joy. Amen.