

Sunday Lesson – December 24/25, 2021

GOSPEL: Luke 2: 1-20

"The Birth of Jesus"

Gospel Reading



"About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel. There were shepherds camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger." At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

Glory to God in the heavenly heights,

Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherds talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were impressed. Mary kept all these things to herself, holding

them dear, deep within herself. The shepherds returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!" The Message

What It Could Mean?

"Beginnings are so very important. The narratives of both Luke and John set a helpful context in which we may hear the Christmas story and promise anew.

Luke 2:1-20 Luke shoots the opening pictures of Christ's nativity with a wide-angle lens, backing far enough out to set the historical context by naming the Emperor and Governor, only to zoom in on something that no Emperor or Governor would ever have noticed: an unwed, teenage mother, homeless for the evening, getting by in the make-shift shelter of a barn, giving birth to her first child, attended only by her husband-to-be and local shepherds.

In this juxtaposition of the grand and the meager, however, Luke witnesses to the irony, even the absurdity of the event we celebrate this night: that God, creator, ruler, and sustainer of the cosmos would not only notice us – our ups and downs, dreams and disappointments, triumphs and tragedies – but would also care about us enough take them on, becoming one of us and one with us.

The implications of this "incarnational narrative" are astounding. Through God's embrace of our lot and our lives, we not only learn about God – that God is love, that God will not give up on us, that there is no length or depth to which God will not go to reach us – we also learn something about ourselves and, indeed, the whole creation. That we have worth. That we have dignity. That we and the whole creation is of inestimable value to God. That all those around us are treasured children of God.

On this night many may hear that God not only notices but also is glad for their blessings and promises to use them to share

blessing with those around them. And there will be many who gather this evening who have put on a joyous face to hide the pain or uncertainty or fear they are feeling. And on this night they may hear that God knows of their struggles, stands with them and for them, and will not let them go. And, of course, there are many – perhaps most – who come holding both joy and sorrow, hope and fear, in their hearts. We are all, on this night, like the shepherds to whom this good news was first given: met right smack in the middle of our lives, honored by God's attention, greeted with good news, and sent to bear witness to others."

Christmas Day: John 1:1-14 (though I would read to 18)

"Again, beginnings are important. John declares that he is writing a new Genesis, a new story of God's interaction with humanity that is every bit as important, and perhaps more, than the original. For according to John, that's what Jesus is – God's reinvention and rebirth and renewal of the whole creation and, indeed, of God's own self, as God comes to make manifest God's enduring commitment to and love for the world in and through ordinary and finite human flesh.

John's functional purpose is clear: what we see in Jesus is what we can expect from God. Jesus is no messenger, but rather is God, creating and redeeming as only God can. Two pivotal lines make manifest John's aim. This eternal and creative and divine word took on human flesh in Jesus (v. 14), introducing a new chapter in the story of God and God's people by creating a new possibility for experiencing God's grace. For while God "as God" is beyond our comprehension or knowledge, yet Jesus reveals God's loving and parental heart, making known to us the character and commitment of the One who created and can redeem us (v. 18).

It's not just grace that Jesus offers, John testifies, but grace upon grace, more grace than we can imagine, grace so abundant it's like the best wine ever offered, rivers of living

water gushing up from our hearts, unending growth of the vine and tree of life.

God coming in the flesh gives humanity hope that we are more than the sum of our parts, that there is more to this world and life than we may at first see, and that God in Christ simultaneously hallows our created lives while also freeing us from the constraints of our frail and fragile condition. For those who believe, Jesus "gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God" (v. 12-13) The Word becomes flesh that all who are flesh may realize and live into our identity as God's beloved children. Now that is something to sing about." *(Excerpts from davidlose.net/2016/12/christmas-eveday-a-christmas-beginnings/)*

Readings for Further Study

- Matthew 1: 18-25 Jesus' Birth
- Micah 5:2; 4:8/Genesis 3:15 Prophecy of Jesus' birth

Thought for the Day

"We see here how Christ, as it were, takes our birth from us and absorbs it in his birth, and grants us his, that in it we might become pure and holy, as if it were our own, so that every Christian may rejoice and glory in Christ's birth as much as if he had himself been born of Mary as was Christ." ~ Martin Luther

A Prayer

"Loving Father, help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men. Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts. May the Christmas morning make us happy to be Thy children, and the Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake."

Amen ~ Robert Louis Stevenson