

Christmas Eve 2020

The Wondrous Gift of the Birth of Jesus

“Sing to the Lord and bless his Name; proclaim the good news of his salvation...” Psalm 96:2

Together with Christians around the world in the quiet stillness of this most holy night, we remember the birth of Jesus with a sense of wonder and awe. We witness the coming of the everlasting Light with the birth of the humble Christ child who enters our world to re-create us in his glorious image. As we listen once again as the ancient story is retold, we realize how it continues to be relevant and deeply meaningful in our own time and circumstances.

Joseph and Mary were humble, ordinary folk much like you and me. They were far away from the centers of economic privilege and political power when they made the long, arduous journey to reach the little town of Bethlehem. Joseph was likely overwhelmed with the sudden and unexpected events that had turned his life up-side-down. As a carpenter and working man, he was not a man of wealth, status, or privilege. He would soon have the responsibility of being a father and caring for his family and he likely did not know what to expect in the future. Thousands of men across America who have lost their jobs worry about the responsibility of caring for their family and do not know what to expect in the future.

Joseph and Mary could not find a decent place to stay because of the crowds of people who had returned to register in the census in Bethlehem. They were forced to take refuge in a cold, dark cave used to shelter animals. The only ones to notice their arrival were the lowly, dusty shepherds and their sheep. Thousands of people who are homeless in America also struggle to find a place of refuge where they can be warm and safe.

Mary as a young teenager bearing a child she had not planned for only had the words of the angel Gabriel to comfort her. He said: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” (Luke 1:30b) So many people in America are living in fear. The miracle of Jesus’ birth brings hope, light and love into our world to comfort to those who are afraid.

It is not an accident that God entered our world at the edge of a tiny town into the humble and impoverished lives of Mary and Joseph and lowly shepherds and sheep rather than in the opulent mansions of the rich and famous. Through the labor pains of a young mother, the unexpected burdens placed on a new husband, and the cry of an infant son, God entered our world as human flesh to be with us and especially the poor, to bring peace, joy, hope and love.

As Mary gazed into the face of her infant son, Mary could not have known what the future would hold for her or her son. And yet, Mary proclaimed, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.’ (Luke 1:46-47) Like Mary, we do not know what the future will hold for us. However, we can be inspired by Mary’s faith and trust that God is in the midst of everything, even if we cannot know the details of God’s plans. We trust that God came to us in the human flesh of Jesus to bring God’s love and healing into all the places of brokenness in our world.

God came to dwell among us to herald a new beginning in which things of the world would be reversed. Mary proclaimed this when she praised God for “...he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.” (Luke 1:51b-53)

The holy infant born in poverty in a tiny village became the One who still sustains, guides, and strengthens us on our own journeys throughout life. His healing touch brings hope to those who are sick and suffering. His teaching and parables help us to understand and know God. His words grant forgiveness to those who have confessed wrong-doing. His eternal words

bring meaning to people around the world.ⁱ This holy infant who had no place at the inn is the One who goes ahead of us and prepares for us mansions in heaven.ⁱⁱ The birth and life of Jesus remind us that the promises of God are being fulfilled.

I want to share with you a story about a woman I met years ago in an old downtown bus station in Lexington. I noticed her in a wheelchair coming down a long hallway. As she approached a heavy door, I opened it for her. She thanked me and shared her faith with me. She said: "I am blessed because I know God loves me." She was probably in her fifties, her right leg had been amputated below the knee, and she only had a ragged hooded sweatshirt to protect her from the winter cold. She relied on a local Christian charity for lunch and a hot cup of coffee. As she spoke, her face lit up as she told me that every day she reads the Bible. She said B-I-B-L-E: "Believe in the Bible and Lord every day." At that moment, I saw the light of Christ radiantly shining from within her. I thanked her for blessing me by sharing her story.

This woman allowed me to understand in a new way what Jesus meant when he said "Blessed are the poor." It does not matter what our personal circumstances are, we can always feel blessed if we believe in our heart that God loves us and we know that God is with us at all times. I admire the beautiful way in which she was a faithful messenger of the Good News of the Gospel.

In proclaiming the gospel, the angel told the shepherds: "...I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 2:10b-11) The angel did not simply say: "Christ is born." The angel said, "to you is born this day...a Saviour." This is good news for you and me and for all of God's children. The coming of Christ in the Incarnation means that no matter who we are, where we are, or what are circumstances are, God is redeeming, loving, and enfolding us with blessings.

We can joyfully share the Good News of the Gospel to bring God's love and healing to others. We can share the Light of Christ to bring peace and joy to others. Mother Teresa famously said that we should do small things with great love. When we do this, we manifest God's love in the world. We transform the ordinary into the sacred through sharing God's eternal love and light to bring healing, hope, peace and joy to others. In this way, we become part of God's plan for changing the world.ⁱⁱⁱ

Gracious and eternal God, on this holy night let your love continue to shine brightly through your beloved son Jesus Christ and through us as your beloved children. Empower us to bring peace, joy, hope, and renewal of life in all the corners of brokenness in our world. Remain with us so that we may joyfully sing new songs of gladness and walk in your way. Amen.

ⁱ The Rev. Dr. Amy Richter, December 24, 2011, Christmas Eve, Sermons that Work.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Adam Hamilton, Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), p. 140.