**ADVENT 421, SHEPHERDS AND PROFESSORS, LK. 2:8-20, MT. 2:1-12, DEC. 19/21**

Well it’s getting closer! We’ve followed the prophets of the OT through Moses, Isaiah, Micah & Malachi, who told us Who, how, where, & if we had looked up Daniel, he would have told us when the Messiah would come. His name would be Immanuel—God with us.

 We recall from the very beginning God had a very high calling for us, because He made us in His own image. He told us to be holy because He’s holy. We realized that we need Some-one who was without sin who could accomplish that holiness part for us because we are not able to do it on our own, ever, or at all. And that Someone, of course is Jesus, Immanuel. Jesus, we discovered, means “the Lord saves”; surely it is His salvation that we so desperately need.

Malachi said God would send someone who’d prepare the way for the Lord’s coming. That was John the Baptist, the last prophet before the coming Christ Child. The prophets prea-ched preparedness to us & promised peace through Christ & gave us this great hope. So, the Jews, God’s chosen people, & we who’ve followed them, have come to anticipate this great peace through Jesus who is surely the fulfilment of prophecy. We can see there’s purpose & design to the universe & the world is moving toward the goal of God. The Child is coming & God will be with us. He’s had a Divine appointment with each of us from the beginning of time.

John the Baptist taught us to unclutter our lives, to keep our paths straight as we pre-pare for Christ’s coming. Christ is coming & will redeem us to what we were intended to be. He has come to “shine on those living in darkness…to guide our feet into the path of peace.” All life is a preparation to lead us to Christ, so that we may walk in the way of life, not death.

Last week we saw Mary & Joseph wrestle to reconcile what God’s angels had said to them & were preparing them for. For Mary, it was grappling with becoming the mother of Christ while still a virgin. Elizabeth, John the Baptist’s mother & Mary’s cousin, provided great comfort & confirmation for Mary. Both Mary & Jo were comforted & reassured by God: “Do not be afraid.” God’s plan was unfolding as it was always intended for the redemption of hum-anity. Both Mary & Jo believed what God said to them**. “Nothing is impossible with God.”**

**In Mary’s song, the Magnificat, we saw life will never again be the same**. Humility will take the place of pride (a moral revolution), the mighty will be brought down while the humble are exalted (a social revolution), & the hungry will be filled while the rich are sent away (an eco-nomic revolution). Jesus will radically change life in a revolutionary way (a spiritual revolution).

Joseph named the Child Jesus, “because He will save His people from their sins.” The Messiah was coming, as promised. **His time was now**. We can’t help but express the same joy Mary & Joseph must have had. **The joy isn’t just in believing the story, but seeing its signific-ance for us!** Do you hear God’s voice speaking to you through His Spirit, through His Word? **Is your joy spilling over, infectious joy**, that even extends to those who don’t yet know Jesus?

**So today**—“Shepherds & Professors”. No nativity scene is complete without the shep-herds & wise men. It’s a continuation of the remarkable that God includes shepherds in His Son’s earthly arrival at all. Shepherds were outcasts of society; often society’s misfits who managed life better left on their own. They were cut from a different cloth as the expression goes. They were dirty, smelly, unkempt & often lumped together with thieves, because they often were thieves. The shepherds were despised by the orthodox people of the day. For starters, by virtue of their work alone, they were simply unable to keep the ceremonial law that required meticulous hand-washings and observances of the rules and regulations of the law.

Nevertheless, what a sweet bit of irony, that these very shepherds were chosen specif-ically by God to share in this event, face to face with the newborn Saviour. The same shepherds who tended the sheep for the temple sacrifices, came face to face with the Lamb of God Him-self, who would free His people once and for all from the sin they could not remove through countless sin offerings of sacrificial lambs. The priests’ preparation of lambs could not do what the real Lamb without blemish could—the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

What a night it must have been! What does it mean that an angel of the Lord appeared to them & the glory of the Lord shone around them? This “glory”—the “shekinah”—is the glory that kept people from being able to look at Moses. It’s the glory that made Jesus brilliant white at the transfiguration. It’s the glory that blinded Paul on the road to Damascus. It’s the glory that lights up heaven in Revelation so much that there’s no need for any sun. Is it any wonder they were terrified? It’s a wonder they recovered so quickly, but recover they did. Once again, we hear those familiar words, “Do not be afraid”, followed immediately by:

“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.”

This is the very centre of the Gospel. Do not be afraid. The Gospel brings us face to face with God, with a God who’s absolutely overwhelming, absolutely holy, but also absolutely love-ly & loving. In the OT people dreaded coming face to face with God, because no one could do that & live. It was a death sentence. **But you remember the revolutionary Jesus?** **He turns ev-erything upside down. The barrier between us & God disappeared when He appeared**. And so the reassurance, “**Do not be afraid.” But immediately another reassurance comes: this is good news of great joy**. May I say it again: it is good news of great joy. Put your trepidation & angst away. God is approachable. He has come & knows the life we live because He too lived it. He knows us because He has made us & He identifies with us. And don’t miss this: this good news of **great joy is for all the people**, not some, but all. That includes you and me.

**Today, not some time in the future**, **a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord**. God didn’t send us relief or support, or a helping hand. This isn’t a self-improvement plan. This isn’t a little value added. We are totally incapable of saving ourselves. God sent us what we needed; 1st and foremost, He overcame our fundamental flaw, our sin nature; God sent us a Saviour. The long anticipated, long awaited Messiah had come. His coming is humble—manger humble—but it is with angel fanfare. Once again in this God-with-us story, angels deliver the great news from God, and one angel is suddenly accompanied by a great company of the heavenly host and their message is “**Glory to God in the highest & on earth peace to all on whom His favour rests.” God wants us to enjoy His favour. He’s for us, for all of us**.

The shepherds gather their senses together, pinch themselves to get a reality check & head for Bethlehem to see what or Who the Lord has told them about, finding the babe just as they’d been told. Then what did they do? When they’d seen Him, they spread the word concerning what they’d been told about this child. How about you? **Have you seen Christ yet? If you haven’t, He invites you to come to Him just as the shepherds did**. If you have seen Him, is your 1st response to tell others about Him, what you know about Him, how He has acted in your life? **The shepherds simply tell the simple, but profound truth.**

And now to the professors. OK, the wise men. They were perhaps Medes from Persia. These Magi were skilled in philosophy, medicine & natural science. They were typically all astrologers. Today they might well be professors; those you look to for insight & knowledge on im-portant issues. **There are widespread accounts outside Judaism close to the time of Christ’s birth of** the expectation of a coming king “from Judea to rule the world, one who would “acqu-ire universal empire”, one who would “become governor of the habitable earth”. William Barclay says “It was to a waiting world that Jesus came; & when He came, the ends of the earth were gathered at His cradle. It was the 1st sign & symbol of the world conquest of Christ.”

The wise men came looking for the newborn “King of the Jews”; they’d seen His star ri-sing & they desired to worship Him. They desired to lay the noblest gifts they could bring at His feet. When anyone realizes the love of God found in Christ, **shouldn’t we also be lost in wond-er, love & praise?** Miraculously, the star led them until it stood over the place where Jesus was.

Though there is no mention of the number of wise men, 3 has become the common understanding because 3 gifts were given. Since they were looking for the King of the Jews, no one would approach a king without a gift. Gold, the “king of metals” then, is a gift fit for the king of men (humanity). And because Jesus is King, we always meet Him at a point of submiss-ion to Him. We certainly do not meet Him as an equal.

Frankincense is the gift for a priest. Its sweet fragrance was used in the Temple worship and at the Temple sacrifices. A priest opens the way to God for people. The Latin word is actually “bridge-builder”. Such a gift then is certainly fitting for Jesus, who radically opened the way to God for all people, to the point of entering His very presence.

And myrrh is the gift for the one who is to die. It was used in embalming. Jesus came to live for us and He came to die for us. He gave us His life and He gave us His death. All of these, then, are fitting gifts, foretelling of the true King, the perfect High Priest and the supreme Saviour of all humanity. And they came to **worship *HIM***. Have you come this morning in the same spirit of heart & mind, dedicated to worshiping Him? For He alone is worthy. The world, includ-ing you & I, have never seen nor will we ever see a greater love than the life-giving Christ offers!

So the shepherds and the magi participated in the great hope of humanity promised by the prophets. They personified the peace that we can all have in Christ. They pursued Him with great joy and expectation—a joy that became even more profound once they found Him and worshiped Him, reverencing Him in true love and adoration.  **Does that describe you too? Share Him, share His love this day, this week, this season!**