

CHRISTMAS EVE - 2024
LUKE 2:8-20 / ISAIAH 9:1-7

On our journey to Bethlehem during this time of Advent we've seen the inextinguishable hope expressed by God's prophets. God would send Someone, uniquely special, unrivalled, and totally qualified to redeem us from our flawed state. He would send a Saviour because He desires us to be like Him, and in our sinful manner, there was no way we could be anything like Him, without Him becoming like us. Though we were created in God's image, God needed to take on our frame and exchange places with us. He'd take our sin and exchange it for His righteousness. We can't even imagine that, but that's the great hope God's given us!

God told Moses He would raise up one like him. Isaiah said He would belong to the house & line of David and would be born of a virgin. Micah told us He would be born in Bethlehem. Daniel gave us the timeframe and Malachi told us that God would send one ahead of Him who would prepare the way for us to prepare for God's coming. That's what we've been doing throughout Advent. Isaiah said His name would be Immanuel—God with us. How different this was than any other god of any other religion. God wouldn't be so high above us and indifferent about us, but would actually be with us, rub shoulders with us and know us because He was one of us. More than anyone could hope for, God had planned from the beginning to redeem us from our incorrigible ways, because He loved us. He loved us so much, that He sent His only Son that whoever would believe in Him would not perish but would have eternal life.

John the Baptist came, preparing the way for the Lord. He showed us the way of peace. But he himself was not the light that would come into the world.

Mary, a virgin, became Jesus' mother through the Holy Spirit and Joseph became his earthly father because both of them believed what God said would happen—this most mysterious way of God. The result was unimaginable joy. Are you experiencing that joy, not only as we celebrate Jesus' birth, but every day? He has come so that your joy may be—complete.

How unlikely it was that the shepherds and wise men would be included in the same story with Jesus. Shepherds were the outcasts of society—shunned by the religious leaders because they didn't keep, couldn't really, the endless rituals that made one clean according to the Judaic law. Ironic, isn't it? The religious leaders were dependent upon the shepherds to provide the daily sacrificial lambs that the Law required, yet they kept them at a distance, so as not to be too dirtied by them, too troubled by them. Have you ever been like that with someone, perhaps someone who's poor, dirty, socially or intellectually very different, or just cut from a different cloth? Nevertheless, God chose to reveal Himself 1st to shepherds.

The wise men came from far away. What did they have to do with a baby born in such humble manner and surroundings? Yet they knew a great king was about to be born. Their questioning alarmed King Herod, who wanted no competition for his title. The magi knew that Jesus would be the King of the Jews and that He would redeem His people. They came for one

purpose—to worship Him. When they saw the star stop over the place where the Child was they were overjoyed! They worshiped Him, then presented their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh—gold: the king of minerals for the King of kings; the sweet-smelling frankincense used in the Temple for worship and sacrifice for the one who'd be the High Priest over all High Priests; and myrrh—used for embalming, a reminder even at birth that He would die for His people. How did they know this? The events in the cosmos, directed mysteriously by God led them in all of this.

So the shepherds and the wise men revealed their love for Jesus—the shepherds by laying everything aside and hurrying to see what they had been told by the angels, then going out and proclaiming what they'd seen and heard to anyone and everyone who would listen. The wise men went to unbelievable lengths to see this Saviour, making it their cause to—not lightly but intentionally to worship. Their gift giving was a central part of their worship. It was their great privilege to participate in and witness this event.

Do you have that kind of commitment, to listen for God's voice with the same excitement and awe as the shepherds did? To make the Saviour the centre of your attention & actions? To show and tell the love of God to anyone and everyone because He means that much to you and will mean that much to others once they get to know Him? To know the joy of knowing Him?

And the wise men. Do you have the same determination to walk to God and then walk with Him—even in the face of stiff opposition and in unfamiliar places like they did? Is your highest goal to worship the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Do you see giving to Him and giving yourself for Him as the highest calling in your life? Do you praise Him, wherever you are?

Finally, what might God have been thinking on this night? Was He thinking He was too busy to look after all the details we mentioned? Was He worried about having the stable tidy for the visitors who came? Was He preoccupied with fear of what Herod might do? Was He distracted by the pace of life? Was He angry that the innkeeper didn't rearrange his guest list to give Mary and Joseph more suitable accommodations? Was He anxious that His Son would fail to fit in or that He would fail in His mission? Was His peace rattled?

I think our Father was looking over this scene with great comfort and exuberance, totally at peace, knowing that the universe was unfolding exactly as it should, from the stars He'd created and put in their orbits, to the details of who would respond to this great event, where they'd be and what part each would play. Tonight's Scripture tells us -“there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress...The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

Jesus is that light. And I believe God was a proud Father, loving His Son beyond all understanding, knowing with confidence Who He was and Who He would continue to be. I believe there was an eternal joy that overwhelmed the sorrow that would come later, only to be

replaced again by eternal joy. Isaiah says God “enlarged the nation & increased their joy...for Jesus has shattered the yoke that burdens them” (and us!).

“For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given & the government will be on His shoulders. He will be called Wonderful(,) Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government & peace there will be no end.” He will uphold David’s throne “with justice and righteousness from this time & forever.”

This babe in the manger is mighty God, who’s come to reset life for us and make it right. Don’t leave Jesus tonight merely as that helpless babe, but enjoy the wonder of it all tonight. Internalize that great joy and peace tonight as deep into your heart as it can possibly go! Jesus desires to be your joy and your peace and your hope at the very core of your being! For God sees you as the apple of His eye. Will you give your whole being to Him to fulfil the plan set in motion in that Bethlehem stable 2,000 years ago?