

Christmas Eve Service

Preached: 12/24/2020; Germantown;

Scripture Reading:

Luke 2:1-20

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

The Christ Candle

For the past several weeks, we have been using the Advent Wreath as a way of thinking about the meaning of Christmas. The wreath is made up of 4 candles surrounding a white candle. The candles on the outside of the ring represent important themes of this season – **Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.** The candle in the center of the circle is called the Christ candle. As we light the white candle we announce that Jesus has Come. Jesus is the source of our Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. The light of the candle reminds us of the words that John wrote about Jesus. ***In Him was life and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.***

Prayer: We thank you God that Christ has come. He has brought light to our world, and to our lives. We yield our lives to Him and pray that He will take His place at the center of our lives. And we pray that from His light will come Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Fill our lives with the Light of Christ. Amen

Message

As we read the story about the birth of Jesus as Luke records it, we become aware that there are really 2 stories taking place at the same time.

The first story is **the story of the Census.** The author, Luke is careful to give us some historical information to help us put the story in context. He tells us that this story takes place during the reign of Caesar Augustus. Augustus born Gaius Octavius. He was the son of Julius Caesar's niece. Julius Caesar adopted him as his own son and heir. He left his wealth and political fortune to Octavius. Julius was proclaimed to be a god, so Octavius or Augustus became known as a son of god. Michael Card describes Augustus as a bloodthirsty tyrant, on the level of Hitler or Mussolini. During his reign he decreed that a census should be taken of the entire Roman World. It was a

requirement that all the men in the empire would travel to the city of their ancestors to register and be taxed. This decree disrupted the lives of everyone in the empire, especially the poor.

In the little town of Nazareth, there was a young carpenter. He was engaged to a woman named Mary. Mary was pregnant before they have come together as husband and wife. We learn that both Joseph and his fiancé Mary have been visited by angels. They are aware that the baby Mary is carrying is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Joseph has been commanded to take Mary as his wife. He accepts the responsibility of protecting and caring for Mary. Joseph is a descendant of one of Israel's king's – David. David's city is the little town of Bethlehem. So Joseph will be required to travel from his home in Nazareth to Bethlehem. It was a considerable distance. Women were not required to travel with their husbands for this census, however Joseph decides that he will take Mary with him. She could have been the recipient of scorn because she was pregnant out of wedlock. He also takes his responsibility to care for Mary seriously. So they make the trip together. Joseph's life along with Mary's were disrupted by the event taking place in the world.

But now we become aware of **another story taking place.** While their lives have been disrupted, God is writing another story. I'm sure that Joseph would have preferred to have stayed in Nazareth, but they must make the trip to Bethlehem. That is important to God's story. Joseph's ancestor David had been King of God's people. God had promised David that a descendent of his would one day become King and rule over God's people forever. He would be the Messiah for God's people. Because the promised Savior will be a descendent of David, God's plan is that He should be born in the city of David – Bethlehem. For God's plan to be fulfilled for this baby of Mary's she would have to travel to Bethlehem. In spite of the way their lives were being disrupted by the events of the world, God was writing another story for the world. God has a plan and He will accomplish His plan. When it looks to Joseph and Mary that everything is out of control and going wrong, Mary's baby is born. And He is a special baby. Angels are sent to announce the birth of this baby. They are sent to shepherds who are terrified by their appearance. But they are told: ***"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.¹⁰ I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*** God

was writing a story of hope and salvation for the world. During the reign of a cruel, bloodthirsty tyrant, the Prince of Peace is born.

In this year of 2020, life as we had known it was disrupted. Things in the world seem to be out of control. A virus is controlling the events of our lives. It has disrupted our lives. Maybe in this holiday season we are more aware of the way this thing has disrupted our world. We are instructed not to travel, to avoid crowds. We can't go shopping. We can visit with loved ones. Our holiday meals are much smaller. Things are a mess. People live with fear, anger, frustration, sadness, disappointment.

The events that we have been living with have not taken over control of the world from God. We are assured that God is still on the throne. The challenge for us as we are living through this terrible crisis is to hear the voice of the angels: ***Do not be afraid!*** Believe that there is another story being written. Look for the work and hand of God at work.

I confess to you that that is hard. This has been one of the hardest periods of my life to believe that God is in control. I pray for people who are sick. And people die. I pray for the death rate to go down. I pray that the virus will not spread. And it feels like my prayers are for naught. But living without faith, falling victim to fear is not a place where I want to be. So I am going to choose to believe and live at peace, trusting that God is still in control. I am going to believe that while this world has been disrupted by a virus, and all the other stuff that has been going on this year, God is writing another story. He is working to accomplish His purposes in our world and in your life. I don't know what that story will look like for you. But I will trust God and cling to Him as Joseph and Mary did. I look forward to a day when we will sing, ***Glory to God in the highest and on earth Peace and good will to all.***

Prayer

Benediction