

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Nativity of Our Lord - Year B
42nd Week of Pandemic
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Isaiah 9:2-7
Pslam 96
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]
12/24/2020

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

1In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. 8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child

wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,14“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” 15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

A God-Child

Good afternoon! As I was preparing for this Christmas Eve sermon, I kept thinking of Thor, of all things. You know who I mean? Strong Nordic god with blonde hair, wields a cool hammer, have you heard of him? He’s played by Chris Hemsworth in the Avengers movies, and it’s clear he takes after my physique. To be clear, I wasn’t thinking of Thor for no apparent reason. As I read the story in the Gospel of Luke regarding the birth of Jesus Christ, I kept thinking about how other gods (little g) were created. Thor was just the first one that came to my mind.

It seems that in most religions and mythology, all the gods were created by either another god or being who already existed, or who always

existed. There is no real talk of what their childhood was like, they seem to emerge as full fledged adult gods who are ready to go. And what's even crazier is that they all have names with neat meanings. Thor is the god of thunder! He's powerful and ready for battle! If we jump to Greek mythology, Zeus too is a god of thunder and sky. If we look at the Egyptian gods we have the powerful Amun-Ra, whose root means "hidden one." If we look at Hinduism, we have the all powerful Shiva, whose name literally means "great god" and he is known as the destroyer. *"Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."*

It's quite the difference isn't it? Thunder, hidden one, destroyer... vs. child and savior. As we read the Christmas story again this year it can be easy to let the story gloss over. It's tempting to turn off our brains and let the emotions that we connect with the story take hold. We might think of the joy of Christmases past, of the good memories we have of worshipping together in one space. But don't be lulled into this feeling! Look again! It's absolutely astounding that the God who created every single thing in this and every galaxy decided that it was time to go even further, to become fully human, like you and I. It's scandalous! And what's more, where other gods come with things like mighty hammers and wage war across the land, our God shows up with the title of savior. This God-child has come to save each and every one of us!

Like I said, we hear the story every year, so we're tempted to tune it out, but the Gospel writer of Luke is telling us in a pretty straightforward manner what God is up to in the world. There is no embellishment, the

story is stark in the humbleness of its reality. As one writer puts it: *“In Bethlehem the Son of the Most High is born to a woman of lowly state, in a lowly place, surrounded by lowly barn animals and persons of low socioeconomic status. The first to witness the birth are persons engaged in a lowly profession, shepherds. Shepherds were considered unclean, dishonest, lower-class persons of ill-repute.”*¹ Another scholar points out that: *“Luke has kept the story clean of any decoration that would remove it from the lowly, the poor, and the marginal of the earth. In the history of the church there have been many so poor and abandoned as to be able to identify with this scene.”*²

It can be tempting to forget that stark reality of this birth story. Over time we’ve treated the story like Rembrandt, casting the event in the soft glow of beautiful light. But when we do this we are forgetting the realness of the story! Our God isn’t born in some perfect place where Mary felt no labor pains and where everything went perfectly, no! Jesus arrives in the hay, a living boy with all the stuff of life around him. He cried like all infants, ushering in the beginning of something profound and world changing!

That’s the God I want and love. If 2020 has taught me anything it’s that life is a mess. Between the hundreds of other things that have happened on top of the pandemic we’ve all been forced to struggle with what it looks like to live our lives when things have been turned upside down. In this respect I think we can understand perfectly what Mary and Joseph were going through. The government doesn’t stop working just because you’re nine months pregnant, and so they journey to Bethlehem, the city of David, where God ushers in the new king.

¹Blount, Brian K., et al. *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. p. 162.

²Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 35.

Fred Craddock points out that *“It was customary in the Roman Empire for poets and orators to declare peace and prosperity at the birth of one who was to become emperor. In that familiar pattern, but from heaven, comes the good news of joy and peace occasioned by birth, not of an emperor, but of him called Savior, Christ, and Lord. And not in palace halls but in the fields, to the poor and lowly, the news comes first.”*³ The first people to hear that wonderful news were just average people, like you and I. And the message remains the same, something incredible has happened... Do you want to come see? Amen.

³Ibid. p35.