

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Nativity of Our Lord - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalms 96

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14[15-20]

12/24/2023

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 Mess

Good evening! If you're like my wonderful wife, then you love a good cheesy Hallmark Christmas movie. You know the ones, the big city woman who works too hard comes home for the holidays and falls in love with the small town man who shows her how to slow down. That sort of thing. My Christmas movie taste is a little different. It's films like the legendary Christmas Vacation and A Christmas Story that speak to me. But in between the jokes you'll notice a similar pattern too. They all start out with good intentions, but quickly devolve into chaos. By the end of the film some major crisis occurs, causing the characters to reevaluate what they thought was important.

It's a lesson that we need reminded of every year. Regardless of how intently I try to focus on the birth and return of our Lord, I can't help but get sucked up into the rush of the consumer season that seems to emphasize the exact opposite of what God intends.

As I entered this Advent and Christmas season the possibility that this might be my last Christmas Eve sermon at St. Paul's truly hit home. It also had me thinking of my first Christmas Eve sermon all those years ago. We were hosting A Night's Welcome that week, and it was a busy one to put it lightly. I remember sitting in the hallway after our guests had gone to sleep while I read in preparation for the sermon. My concentration was interrupted by the sounds of a crying child. We had a family with an infant sleeping in our nursery. I'll never forget how powerful that moment was for me. If I needed an illustration for what it would have been like for Mary and Joseph, that was certainly it. Just like the movies I enjoy, the lives of this family had been turned upside down, but this time it wasn't a joke.

In this season where we seem to cast a loving light on everything, we are reminded that this wasn't just a story for Mary. We forget that Mary was a young girl, most likely between the ages of 12-14, traveling a great distance at the end of her pregnancy. She had likely faced ridicule and criticism from family and friends during that time, all while knowing that the child in her womb would save the world. What a burden this young woman must have borne. They arrive in Bethlehem only to be forced to give birth in a shed or cave.

As Pastor Colleen Montgomery of All Places Together said on Instagram this week, it seems that the first Christmas was a bit of a mess. But I think that's ok. It drives home a wonderful point... God doesn't care.

And God isn't going to wait for us to get our crap together before showing up. In fact, God shows up in the most unlikely of places!

In the devotion that I read on Wednesday that was written by seminarian Andy Taminger, he makes the wonderful point that the peace that the angels proclaim is different from the promises we hear so often from others. *“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!”*

This was something different! It hadn't been announced from the city center, it wasn't a public decree from the emperor, there was no press release from the office of the governor. No, this was told to the least likely of people, shepherds. This was like finding some backwood hillbilly in the middle of nowhere in West Virginia and choosing them to be the first to hear the most important thing to ever happen. (I can make that joke because I'm from WV!) Shepherds were the lowest of the low, but God turns the world upside down. Instead, God informs those with nothing that they will soon inherit everything. Things had been changed forever! And the shepherds would be the first to witness it.

What a privilege. It reminds us that we too have an obligation. As we gather together with friends and family this evening we are reminded that the first Christmas was one heck of a mess. There are others all around the world who are also having a hard season too. And so we're called to be the angels of the story. Did you know that the Greek word for angels just means

messengers? When we leave this place we go out and announce that same message of hope and peace that was proclaimed on some random hillside 2,000 years ago. Words that are true. Words that mean something. Words that change everything. *"11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."* Amen.