

The Light of Peace...

December 13, 2009

Luke 2: 8-20. Luke gives us the visitation of the Angels to the shepherds, who were out watching their flocks by night. The angels came to tell them about the arrival of the messiah, God's promised savior of the world. It is as if after all these years, after all the promises of the Old Testament are fulfilled...they have to tell someone! But the Religious leaders are so intent on a Military and Political Messiah that they would not have listened even to a chorus of angels breaking forth in the night sky...their minds were made up! The Romans were not interested in any Messiah...he would be considered a threat to that which they thought of as the eternal empire...ROME. But It is more than just going to who is left. God chooses the shepherds and the message he gives them purposefully. God does nothing by accident!

Unto you is born this day a savior. Unto you...specific. Unto you, unto Me and unto you...to each of us this day is born a savior. The Shepherds were first from the ordinary people. The Pharisees considered the ordinary people the "trash". They referred to them as garbage and as sinners. They said that they only existed as fuel for the fires of hell. The ordinary person could not get into heaven they felt, because they could not follow the exacting laws that the Pharisees set out that they felt were necessary to please God. The ordinary people were too busy making a living and trying to do right and feed their families to do the burdensome requirements. Jesus often talked about the burdens the Pharisees had put upon the people, a burden that in truth they themselves could not really carry. No one could. You cannot be saved by keeping the law in its totality. Because none of us is perfect. That is just stating what most of us would agree is an obvious fact. None of us is perfect. We all do things that we know we shouldn't and we all don't do things that we know we should.

Further, the angels did not just come to ordinary people; they came to shepherds out in the fields. Shepherds were often looked at down their noses by other ordinary people. First because the job of the youngest child was to be that of the shepherd. Where was David when the Prophet Samuel came to his family to look for the next king among his father's sons? He was out with sheep, he was the youngest...he did not count. They did not even bother to send for him when Samuel asked that all of Benjamin's Sons be assembled. The hired shepherd was worse, because it was a good way for someone who wanted to get lost and not be found to do so...they spent long hours and days out with the sheep...away from everyone else. They were literally "on the Lamb".

Yet to these ordinary ones and the these outcast ones came the word of the Lord. Came the messengers of God himself! Unto you is born this day in David's town a savior, who is Christ the Lord! They received a special word from God, announcing God's act of loving salvation for them and the whole world! Wow.

Has anybody ever made you feel small, unworthy or insignificant? Merry Christmas! Unto you is born a savior, who is Christ the Lord! Have you felt yourself unworthy, a terrible sinner who is undeserving of God's grace? Merry Christmas, unto you is born today a savior who loves and forgives you! Do you feel small and unimportant? You are God's beloved! Christmas is for you! For you...the angels came. For you is born a savior! The good news is for all people, but the angels make a visit to these who are outcasts to tell them the news.

This will be a sign to you, you will find a baby lying in a manger. This is how they will know the Christ, the savior, the Lord's anointed...he will be wrapped in swaddling cloth and lying in a feed trough. Of course! Where else would you find the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Where else would God incarnate be lying following his birth but a manger with hay with cows and donkeys and sheep all around? Not just an ordinary baby, but with ordinary people...in an even less than ordinary place.

The Apostle Paul talks about Jesus humbling himself and pouring himself out or into his humanity...and becoming human, and being fully human, he became a servant—even unto death on the cross. The manger is the first step to the cross. It is quite an image, isn't it? The one who is the visible image of the invisible God, in whom the fullness of deity dwells, being born not in a chapel or cathedral, or castle, or university...not even a house...but a barn! On the edges of humanity. How much he loves us ,to empty himself so completely for us! To draw so near to us!

And the promise of the angels message...

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to all men!

When we got the manger and see for ourselves, we experience the glory of God...and his peace.

The glory of God in our souls lifts us up. It is in essence, praise and worship! We are filled with joyfulness and wonderful and praise. The term Glory is the term Doxos, from which we get the term Doxology. It means to praise from within...it is a musical term and refers to the ringing of a bell. The true nature of a bell, it's true "glory" is the ringing of it true note that comes through loud and clear after it has been cast and polished. Only then do you hear the heart of the bell...it's center, it's true pitch. Our praise of Christ is the same, it comes from our heart, from our true center. It reveals our true nature. Our praise must ring authentic, from the heart and soul, not in some particular style but in our own Praise of his glory.

What makes our heart sing in Praise of Christ? For some it is singing songs of praise and playing music...in worship or alone. They sing and rejoice and play and sing...and worship. For others, their heart sings seeing the needs of others meet; feeding the hungry is like singing Amazing Grace, working for the homeless is like singing "Our God is a Mighty God" ...it stirs the soul and stratifies it

at the same time. For others it is caring for children and helping them understand how much Jesus loves them and how we love them too...for them "Jesus loves me" plays over again in their souls time and again. When we are doing what God has called us to do...individually, our hearts will rejoice and sing, and God will be praised like a church bell ringing on a clear Christmas morning or like angels singing on a crystal clear Christmas night...Glory to God in the Highest!

And we find God's peace...not only in doing, but in being. In being loved like we are. When you know you are loved, you feel secure. When you feel secure, you find yourself at peace...happy and secure. At Peace.

Jesus said "Peace I give you, my peace I leave you. Not as the world gives do I give to you." (John 14).

How is Jesus' peace different from the World's peace? The world's view of peace is the temporary lack of conflict. It is not people really loving one another, or even really liking one another. It is people learning to not hate one another so much. It is people learning to tolerate each other.

That kind of peace is always temporary.

Jesus' peace is beyond human understanding. That's because he is at work in it. His love and grace and forgiveness...which are at work in us...in Christmas (unto you is born a savior, who is Christ the Lord), are at work in his peace.

Jesus peace reflects the Old Testament concept of Shalom. Shalom means wholeness of being, being made complete or content. It is based on two great things: first, that you are loved and accepted completely by God. And Second, that you are given Grace and that you are forgiven in Christ Jesus. Being loved and being forgiven means that I am free to have a whole relationship with God, with others, with myself.

And we are never alone, for Christ is with us.

So when we go through life and it is difficult and life gets overwhelming and the pieces get hard to overcome—or even carry---we turn to God's grace in Christmas, Jesus. He is our peace. He is the one who is given to us. He is the one who gives us peace...a sense of wholeness and contentment. He gives us a sense of being, of contentedness...of wholeness, regardless of how successful we are in the world's eyes, because he is with us always. We are still loved, and we shall have peace!

What does it mean for me?

A lot! I go through hard times, like everyone else does. But as a chronic pain sufferer, I struggle with pain, medication, doctors, procedures, and more pain. Let just say it often interrupts my life and my ministry and it can be very frustrating. I joke that I can only work 50 hours a week now, how can I get anything done! I joke that it is a real pain in the rear...literally!

But at the same time, through it all, the often excruciating pain that disrupts my doing and invades my thinking by day and even my dreams at night, that prevents me from walking or standing—God has given me such a peace! Not a lack of conflict...I am in conflict with the pain all the time; I fight it at every turn and my motto is to never give up and never give in. But I am at peace...that Christ is with me in it all times. And when I am weak, then his strength is revealed and then I am made strong in him. That all is well, because God is with us. That God loves us, yes, even us, even me...even one such as me. That unto me is born a savior...and that God has great things in store for us.

The church has had similar experience as it has gone through the building process. We have been stopped and delayed again and again. But through it all, we have felt the presence of God and the leading of

Christ. We have had a sense of peace and wholeness...that God is with us..that we have a savior and a message of hope for the downtown that God has called us to share regardless of what building we are in...and God calls us to care for the needy and to feed the poor and to help those who can not help themselves, even if we have no permanent home.

And God reminds us

The angels came for us too....

Unto us is born a savior, who is Christ the Lord....

We are loved beyond measure....

As we follow our hearts desires, our songs will join together,
giving God great glory,

And God will give us peace of heart and soul and mind!

Peace that the world cannot know or understand or touch.

*For unto you is born in David's town a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
And this will be a sign to you, you will find mother with child, wrapped
in cloth lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a
great heavenly host and they were singing,*

Glory to God in the Highest, on Earth Peace to all Men! "