

December 10, 2017 Her Firstborn Luke 2:1-7

At first glance there is nothing remarkable about the unfolding story. It would never appear on the 6:00 o'clock newscast. It is too...common. And besides it is overshadowed by the Imperial story. Caesar Augustus has issued a decree. There is to be a census. Now, that is news. Investigative journalism would quickly discover, the census is related to taxation. The price of everything will go up. The Empire needs money to function...more money. Poverty will grow. The poorest (isn't it always the case?) will suffer the most. But then, who really cares about the poor.

Lost in the swirl of what we would call the important issues, Jesus, as a result of circumstances beyond the control of Joseph, beyond the control of Mary, Jesus is born in Bethlehem. Prophecy is fulfilled. The young woman, who has never been with a man, who is not yet in fact married, has her first baby...a son.

There was a time when church historians and theologians alike would say the Protestants, including Presbyterians, just do not pay enough attention to the young woman, to Mary. But as Christmas approaches... 2 weeks plus a day away... Mary is impossible to ignore. Caesar makes his decree in Rome. Joseph in Nazareth decides to comply, and arranges the trip from Nazareth to the city of David. However...notice this...the spotlight falls on Mary. The Holy Spirit touches Mary. Mary submits to the will of God. She is

expecting a child. She makes the journey at the side of her husband to be...there has not been a wedding at this point. And the time comes. She goes into labour. She bears a son while they are in Bethlehem. She wraps the child in swaddling clothes....rags actually. She makes the best of the stable accommodation. She lays her infant son in a manger.

The fact is, no one of consequence even notices. Joseph had tried to get them a room in the Inn. No vacancy. We are not told who...I suspect it was the wife of the landlord, took pity and made them the offer of the stable. We in the 20th century get the wrong impression. We think (at very least) shed...out of the weather. Perhaps even warm. The Gaithers mean well but they add to the illusion...they write the song...."Come and see what's happened in the barn." It is in fact a bit of a cave. Open to the elements. You cannot change the simple fact. It is cold. It is uncomfortable. Yes, it is better than no roof at all. But it underlines a simple truth...The Messiah is born... The Saviour of the world is born... God's Son is in our world...and there is no room for HIM to be cradled. And if for a moment you set aside the devotion of Mary to HIM...no one seems to notice. As I said, no one of consequence.

I am even tempted to say...and we still do not notice HIM. The songs I hear Monday to and including Saturday, are about the marvels of a winter wonderland. Frosty the snowman. Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, and of course, Santa Clause, St. Nicholas, and shopping for gifts for ourselves.

And I find myself thinking Luke really has the details right. I mean, he has nailed this matter of truth...there is no room in the hotel for Mary or her son, or for Joseph for that matter. And yet, there is an inevitability about Christmas.

Please don't get me wrong. This is not a rant. And I do not want any of you to feel guilty. There is not one detail we can change. It is all true. Caesar made a decree about taxes or a census that would make the system better able to hit all its intended Imperial targets. Joseph takes his family to Bethlehem, which is to say he obeys the law, Mary is pregnant, the timing is what it is, she goes into labour... her firstborn. She does everything she can to make HIM comfortable. She and Joseph have been told...(are angels real?)... "The Lord is with you...you will give birth...HE will be called the Son of the Most High...He will reign over the house of Jacob...His Kingdom will never end." Mary, and Joseph too, do everything they can. But the facts are the facts. A hole in a wall of rock. No room in the Inn.

What are we to make of it all? It is clear our options are....limited. We can dismiss it. The whole story. Or like Mary herself, we can submit and I mean submit to the fact of revelation. "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me...to us...as God has said. That really is where we find ourselves is it not? We dismiss the challenge of "fake news." Like Mary we have been touched by the "power of God" and cannot dismiss it. We strive to live as believers and yet we have at least one

foot...sometimes a foot and three quarters...in the world of our time trying to understand the world and its ways.

I am, as you are, with Mary. Striving to understand where the journey of faith has taken me. On the one hand trying to bow before the will of the Lord God Almighty. On the other hand trying to make sense of a world that seems ... crazy. Threats and rumours of war. Violence. Sexual misbehavior, and abuse of power. And an angel crowning the Christmas tree in my living room. Angels decorating my front lawn. Angels and light that casts out the darkness.

This is what I know in moments of confession. I am not sinless, in fact I am sinful. In moments of quiet reverence, whispering this name...Jesus...I feel the guilt drain away. It becomes clear to me that I believe as too much of the world does not believe...that God still holds the world in HIS hands. That Jesus saves. That when I gather with people who cherish the teaching of the Gospels, my soul revives. And yes there is even joy in my heart and hope in my mind. So I find myself tempted to say...can it really be? Mary, lead me. You have covered this ground better than I have.

As this season flowers and breaks upon us in the fullness of its wonder and joy, help me feel your tenderness as you laid the baby in the hay filled trough. Help me to hear the songs of angels, and to know I am once again swept up in the most important details of history...all about Jesus. Help me to submit in the midst of painful circumstances where I want to

rebel, where I want things to be different than they are. Wipe my tears away. And heal me in the brokenness of worldliness. Bless me...as I discover once again, the grace and the love, the mercy and the hope, only found, in your firstborn son.

Let us pray;

Lord God Almighty, whose kingdom shall never end, touch us as we journey towards, as we experience the day, and make our way forward from Christmas. Feed our faith life that we might be alive to you and recognizing lives we may touch in your name with kindness that meets real need. In Jesus name. Amen