

December 12, 2021 Christmas Is About Hope Pt. 3 Luke 2:4-20, Ephesians 2:12-14

So! Such a little word, which begins to tell us such important details. It was in that time when Augustus was Caesar in Rome. Quirinius was governor in Syria. The time of the great census, which was also the first census that Rome called for. It was about building an Empire wide tax base. It required everyone to register in the town of their birth. So! Joseph went from Nazareth in Galilee, to Bethlehem in Judea. He went from Nazareth to Bethlehem because he was of the house and line of David. And he took Mary with him, because she was pledged to be married to him, and she was expecting her first child. There was no choice in the matter. Augustus Caesar had called for the census, and the whole of the Empire had to obey the law.

So! While they were there, in Bethlehem, the time came. Her water broke. She went into labour. In the midst of circumstances that were difficult, Joseph sheltered her in the only place he could find. A place meant for cattle, and livestock. She delivered a baby boy. There was simply nowhere else for them to stay. She wrapped her first born son in cloths, swaddling HIM, and laid him in a manger, “no crib for a bed,” and no room in the inn. HE who is the light of the world, entered our world. It was cold. It was dark.

So! On the hills that surround Bethlehem, and they are not unlike the foothills of Alberta, there were shepherds

watching their flocks, doing their duty, to both the sheep and their owners. It was during the night. The shepherds were walking among the sheep, giving comfort to their skittish charges, carrying their crooks, watching for danger, looking for predators. Suddenly, terrifying in its suddenness and brilliance, the glory of the Lord shone about them. They saw the angel, a messenger of God, who told them this: "Today, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, has been born to you, in Bethlehem. This will be a sign to you. You will find the baby wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger." And as if that were not enough, there was suddenly not just one angel but a choir of the heavenly host. And they sang, praising God. "Glory to God! And peace to men on whom HIS favour rests!" And then they were gone.

So! "To us?" To these who are unclean? Indeed. To lowly shepherds is made the announcement of the birth of the Christ, (that's Greek for the Messiah) foretold in the prophets. So the decision is made. They will go to the city. They will search for the child in the manger, and they find HIM, and Mary and Joseph, the parents. It is just as the angel said it would be, and they tell everyone they can talk to, the story of the light that burst upon them, the angel who announced the news of a Saviour, the Saviour for whom Israel has been waiting and hoping. A crowd has gathered, and amazement spreads among them. The baby, the news of angels in the night sky and the sound of heaven which is their singing. So!

And Mary did not forget a single detail. She treasured these details says the NIV. The King James Version says, "she

kept all these things in her heart, and pondered them.” They became reference points by which she processed things that happened later, like when Jesus as a boy questioned and answered questions put by the priests at the temple, and in Cana when Jesus gave instructions and the water turned to wine at a wedding feast, and when Jesus announced that the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled as HE read from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, and the congregation tried and failed, to kill HIM.

So. Such a little word! Do you know what the Oxford Dictionary says it means? It is an adverb. That means it describes action, things that happened. Here is what the Oxford Dictionary says: “to the extent set forth in preceding clauses.” In this case in other words, as the angel said, as the shepherds said, as Mary and Joseph heard, as the people who gathered heard and were amazed. It means these are factual testimonies. That is why at Christmas time we reread them, we sing carols that call them to mind, even the unchurched sing the carols and watch the pageants in which the details are re-enacted. And usually children play the parts and lead the way. Christmas is a time when hope is in the very air we breath!

And you must be wondering with all that is in Luke chapter 2, why would I read from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians? It offers us a very personal reminder of the reason for this season. “Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope, and

without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, you once who were far away, have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”(Ephesians 2:12 & 13)

We were never Jewish. We did not read the Old Testament, until we crossed a line that formerly would have been impossible to cross. As Gentiles, we had more in common with the shepherds than any of the other Biblical figures. And just as God reached out and touched those shepherds, HE reached out and touched us. Faith became part of the definition of who we are. Worship became part of what we do. Christmas became for most of us one of two central celebrations. Christmas and Easter. Jesus birth day, and Jesus resurrection day. Ever linked in our understanding, and ever revealing our relationship with God. Saved by faith and not by works, but inspired to do stuff that shows we have learned the Lord wants us to be caring in our relationships with others. To love neighbours who are very different than we are. To accept the fact that God loves them for the very reason HE loves us. The depth and the height of our need for the reality of the glory of the Lord, the light that breaks the darkness, and brings Jew and Gentile into the same circle.

So the Old Testament has become treasured by us. The commandments of the Old Testament have not been trashed by the New Testament, they have become guideposts by which believers live every day. And the prophecies we understand as words by which to measure the New Testament teaching concerning Jesus. So many of the details in the Gospel,

of Jesus teaching and ministry, which includes the miracles, are accompanied by the words, “and so were fulfilled the words of the prophet...” The authority of the revelation in Scripture is in the reality that it is not two different sets of documents, but one complete set of documents. As they used to teach us in Seminary, the New Testament documents fulfill the teaching of the Old, and the Old Testament documents are the rough guardians of the New. The Old Testament defines who God is, and what we should be looking for in the Saviour, HE would send. Jesus lives up to that standard, in fact HIS teaching continually calls to mind the words of the Old Testament. So?

So we read the story of the shepherds. And we are moved by what is revealed to them and their going into Bethlehem and finding the baby Jesus, the mother Mary, the father Joseph, and telling, it was just as the angels had said. And they celebrated. They sang as they went back to work, they praised and they glorified God, for what they had seen and heard. Because they were filled, with new found faith, and new found hope. And down through the ages, the turning of the centuries, the testimony is the same. In Jesus we find the One who saves. In Jesus we find hope such as only God can give. We find it! We light candles as symbols of the details. Why? Because Christmas, Jesus birth, this revelation of God’s love, is about hope, The news of this season fills people, fills us with joy, and it is for all the people. Hope through new found faith, in Jesus.

Let us pray;

Lord as we make this journey toward Christmas, 13 days from now, help us to focus on the real gift, YOUR love revealed in Jesus, born in the stable, laid in the manger in Bethlehem. Open our hearts and our minds that we might have room for HIM. Grant that our hearts might, be Bethlehem.
Amen