

## **Let's go to Bethlehem!**

**Reading: Luke 2.1-20**

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**Good morning everybody, a happy joyful, loving Christmas to you all.**

**OK, it's two days after, Christmas Day, Jesus Birthday, but for us the celebration goes on, doesn't it.**

**In today's bible reading from Luke chapter 2, we are told that a group of Shepherds were gathered together in the fields guarding their sheep, when the sky lit up with a choir of angels praising and glorifying God.**

**"The angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified..." And wouldn't we all have been?**

**The angel said, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the city of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.**

**This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."**

**The Saviour! The Messiah (Christ)! The Lord! Wow! That is good news! But it's a bit scary too. Centuries of divine promise have come and gone. The Lord's people had sometimes followed, sometimes wandered away from him. But now at last he has come - the Saviour, Christ the Lord! But – born in a manger?**

**But why us? Simple shepherds, why us? Why should we be called to the stable to see the Holy Child. King David, started life as a humble shepherd, does that give us special status?**

**The angelic announcement is followed by a whole chorus of angels singing praises to God - "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."**

**Yes, indeed. Here is good news. If the Messiah has come, we certainly will praise God in the highest, and all who welcome him will know his peace! But - in a manger and the message comes to humble shepherds?**

**"Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."**

**The shepherds believed the message and set off to Bethlehem, where they confirmed all that they had been told to them. Yes, the Saviour Christ the Lord had been born - and laid in a manger.**

**Let us make the journey to the stable to acknowledge and bow our Knee before the baby Jesus and we need his presence with us so very, very much.**

**How do we feel, how are we coping? We are in the middle of a tier 3 Pandemic lock down. What is Christmas going to mean for us?**

**Jesus is still the same Jesus who cares and loves us and provides for us, the prophesy explaining Jesus love for us, can be found in Isaiah chapter 61, is especially for us today**

**In ch. 61, Jesus says "The Sovereign Lord has filled me with his Spirit. He has chosen me and sent me to bring good news to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to announce release to**

**captives and freedom to those in prison. He has sent me to proclaim that the time has come when the Lord will save his people and defeat their enemies.**

**He has sent me to comfort all who mourn, to give to those who mourn in Zion, In general terms, the picture we have of the Spirit in the Old Testament is that he was given to just a few specific people for specific practical tasks. As we have noted the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah is described as being filled with the Spirit for a task. In ch. 42, he is to “bring justice to every nation” (v 1,3,4).**

**But there was good news for the poor, healing for the broken-hearted, release for the captives, salvation from the hand of enemies, comfort, joy and gladness for the mourners...**

### **Jesus Task**

**In the New Testament, Luke records that after Jesus’ baptism he “returned from the Jordan full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit into the desert” where he was tempted by the Devil (4.1-13). After the temptation “Jesus returned to Galilee, and the power of the Holy Spirit was with him” (v. 14a).**

**“Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath he went as usual to the synagogue. He stood up to read the Scriptures and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people.’ Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him, as he said to them, ‘This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read’”**

**Do you remember playing the childhood game, "Hide and seek"? Some elements of it have changed across the years but its essentials remain the same. After the count to a hundred, the "seeker" calls out "Coming, ready or not!" Just too bad if you're not hidden by then - you've had your chance!**

**Well - Christmas has come, ready or not! I hope that all of us have done all we needed to do because - it has arrived!**

**Too often our Christmas can be just one Day! If we will receive Jesus into our life, his presence will transform every day and all of our life! For he did not come to give us Christmas, but to give himself and to become our Saviour and our Lord!**

**Dramatic! Not just another partial fulfilment. Not the hoped-for immediate fix to their present social, political and economic situation—which in fact has continued to have its ups and downs since that time.**

**Historically, for the Jewish people, there have been more “downs” than “ups” across the centuries since Jesus came!) Jesus the Son of God came in the middle of human history for all people and all time! He was not the political King they had hoped him to be. In his caring for people in all their needs, he was in no sense the political activist campaigning for social justice that Liberation Theologians have wanted him to be.**

### **Our Task**

**There was part of Jesus’ task that was exclusively his. He alone could create the good news by giving his life for human sin. Yet the Day of Pentecost reminds us that he has passed the**

**task on to us. The risen Jesus said to his disciples, “As the Father sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20.21). The work of salvation was complete. The task of bringing people to receive and know salvation was just beginning.**

**As we recall the events of the first Christian Pentecost—that the Holy Spirit is now given to all believers—we do well to reflect on our task. The words that Jesus quoted in the synagogue in Nazareth may be a good beginning point—bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, free the oppressed, announce that the time has come to receive the Lord’s salvation...**

**As we said at the beginning, the door of heaven has been blown open, salvation from sin is freely offered to all who repent and believe the gospel. The Holy Spirit is given to all who believe in Jesus Christ.**

**Howard Thurmond wrote about it in this poem.**

**When the song of the angels is silent  
When the star in the sky is gone  
When the kings and princes are home  
When the shepherds are again tending their sheep  
When the manger is darkened and still  
The work of Christmas begins—  
To find the lost  
To heal the broken  
To feed the hungry  
To rebuild the nations  
To bring peace among people  
To befriend the lonely  
To release the prisoner  
To make music in the heart.**

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**A time of joy and gladness instead of grief, a song of praise instead of sorrow. They will be like trees that the Lord himself has planted. They will all do what is right, and God will be praised for what he has done” (v 1-3).**

**My loving brothers and sisters in Jesus, I pray that the love and care we have for each other, will bind us together at this time of lock down. We are people of God. Jesus is our Lord and master, and we are still his people of the way, Jesus Way, always Jesus way. Amen**