

Sermon 25 December 2023 – Christmas Day

By Revd Karen Adendorff

‘...the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord’ (Luke 2: 10-11)

It's Christmas! There is joy and excitement in the air. Can you feel it? Are **you** excited? Yes...there are Christmas lights and trees and music everywhere. Everywhere, every year, people seem to look forward to Christmas. It is a time full of joy, singing and giving. It does not seem to get old or boring, isn't that so? So, what do you think makes Christmas so special? That's right...Jesus. That's the whole reason for celebrating Christmas! Although, it does not always seem like it, hey? We sometimes make it about us and the presents we hope to receive.

In the gospel reading we heard that Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem. And while they were there Jesus was born and Mary placed him in a manger. Who can tell me what a manger is? Yes...it is an open box that is used to put food or water in for animals to eat and drink from. Oh, my goodness! What a strange place to put a new-born baby. Why would Mary place Jesus in a manger? Yes... there was nowhere else for them to stay – no room in the inn - because all the places in Bethlehem were full.

The story goes on to say that there were shepherds living in fields close by, looking after their sheep, when something strange happened. Do you know what that was? Yes, an angel of the Lord appeared, and this frightened them. Goodness, I wonder what it is about angels that frighten people? Every time angels appear, someone is frightened. Yesterday in the gospel reading it was Mary and today the shepherds. But the angel reassured – calmed – them and said, **“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^a the Lord.”** (Luke 2: 10-11) Then a whole group of angels appeared, praising God.

Listen again to what the angel said, “I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.” Have you ever received great news? What was it? Did you keep it to yourself, or did you share it with others? Now who can tell me what the good news was that the angel brought to the shepherds? Yes, that “a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord” is born. And this person is...Jesus.

Now the word Messiah means “chosen one.” And so, we see that the story of Christmas is that God chose Jesus to be our Saviour and Lord. God did this because God loves us and wants to be part of our lives. The birth of Jesus is God coming to live among us and within us and it brings with it a message of life and light, love and peace and hope. A message that makes a difference in the world – the angel said this message is “good news of great joy for all the people.” (Luke 2: 10)

All our readings this morning tell of singing, joy, and visions of what it means to live in hope. And hope is the confident / sure expectation that God is working in and through God’s people to carry out God’s plan. And that plan is that all people should enjoy a new and restored relationship with God. This is the message each one of us is called to share. The shepherds went to Bethlehem to see what the angel had told them and after they had seen they went and told others. Christmas is a time of joy and singing and giving. Giving love and hope and peace and joy. All the things God first gave us in Jesus.

Sadly, the town of Bethlehem today is struggling with joy and peace and hope. The town is quiet – no usual tourists present. The borders are closed. Ola Musleh writes, “I’m a Christian Palestinian in Bethlehem. This Christmas, we feel alone and broken. As a Palestinian Christian, cancelling Christmas celebrations this year feels right...We are “angry and sad and afraid over what’s happening in Gaza.” They are concerned that they are no longer safe living in Bethlehem and that they too will become victims of the war. (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2023/12/23/christmas-cancelled-bethlehem-gaza-israel-war-suffering/72003527007/>)

So, I ask that we pray, desperately, unceasingly, that their hope may be renewed and that they will remember that is precisely for this very reason – brokenness, war, division, injustice – that God entered the world in the person of Jesus. In response to Christians in Bethlehem holding a muted celebration to mark Christmas, Revd Tim Gray writes, “to rejoice is not to be merry or insensitive but it is to be alive to the word made flesh and to a light that overcomes the darkness.”

Let us pray that the gift of “good news of great joy” may once again, soon, ring out in Bethlehem and all places – here in our communities and afar off in places like Israel and Gaza that all people may know the joy, peace, hope and love that is born in Jesus today.

I have a nativity scene for the children to build at home as reminder of what the Christmas story is all about and the message of love, joy and hope of salvation that it brings and that we are called to live and share with others.

Amen