

“The Redemption of Scrooge: Keeping Christmas Well”

Luke 2:1-20

12/24/2016

Luke begins his nativity story with, “In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.” Luke wants to make sure that Jesus birth narrative is situated in a specific time and place. This is the story when God entered into human history, not with thunder and lightning, but with a chorus of angels and lowly shepherds and a wandering family placing their newborn child in a feeding trough. *In those days...* Luke wants us to know that this is God becoming flesh, in a real time and in a real place, with hands and eyes, and needing constant care, unthinkable humility for the Creator of all that is, seen and unseen.

There’s a transformation happening. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which means “house of bread.” Jesus is the Bread of Life, placed in a feeding trough because it is Jesus upon which we feed to be filled with God’s unconditional love, also known as grace. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, which Means “new shoot,” because Jesus is the fulfillment of stories in God’s word fortelling his coming into the world. It is also the new way God is choosing to be with God’s people. Jesus lived his final days in Jerusalem, the “city of peace,” because it is through the cross that we find our peace with God and with each other. Jesus birth means “those days” are passing, and “this day” will be with us forever!

The angels appeared in the heavens, not saying, “In those days....” rather they proclaimed, “To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” *In those days*, the palace ruled the world, but on *this day* the world is being turned upside down. *In those days*, the shepherds were less than unimportant, but on *this day*, the shepherds received a gift of the kingdom of God! *In those days*, we simply read about a miracle. *On this day*, we expect one. *In those days*, we tried to make our traditions and material gifts perfect. *On this day*, we let go of the anxiety of making things perfect so that we can make room for a perfect God. *In those days*, our Christmas list was full of material things for friends, family and coworkers. *On this day*, our list contains what Jesus wants. It’s his birthday

after all. Jesus wants the proclamation of good news, release, recovery, freedom and favor. *In those days*, we worried about what's under the tree instead of the tree itself. *On this day*, we see clearly the Giver of Life.

The angels' proclamation is timeless. When we read the angels' words, "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord," we speak a timeless truth, making Christ's presence with us an ever-present reality. It's a word that becomes timeless because it is always in the present, which is the place God resides, the place where God lives. *In those days*, Christmas was seen as our birthday.

This reminds me of a scene from the 1947 film "The Bishop's Wife" One character is a minister and he preaches these words for his Christmas Eve message, *"Tonight I want to tell you the story of an empty stocking. Once upon a midnight clear, there was a child's cry. A blazing star hung over a stable and wise men came with birthday gifts. We haven't forgotten that night down the centuries; we celebrate it with stars on Christmas trees, the sound of bells and with gifts. But especially with gifts. You give me a book; I give you a tie. Aunt Martha has always wanted an orange squeezer, and Uncle Henry could do with a new pipe. We forget nobody, adult or child. All the stockings are filled -- all that is, except one. And we have even forgotten to hang it up. The stocking for the child born in a manger. It's his birthday we are celebrating. Don't ever let us forget that. Let us ask ourselves what he would wish for most, and then let each put in his share. Loving kindness, warm hearts and the stretched out hand of tolerance...All the shining gifts that make peace on earth."* On this day, may we remember that this is the night we celebrate Jesus' birth.

The announcement was made to the shepherds, and maybe this is the key to understanding what God is doing – God is favoring the poor with this grand announcement. God delivers the good news to the shepherds, not because they were best equipped to spread the news, or that they were nearby and it was convenient: it is because God was already there, with the unlikely.

We are called to *keep*, we are called to *keep Christmas*, we are called to *keep Christmas well*. In Charles Dicken's classic story "A Christmas Carol," the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come certainly aided Scrooge in discovering how to keep Christmas well. The compassion he

found for crippled Tiny Tim and his employee Bob Cratchit stirred Scrooge's soul. Reliving the joy of a past Christmas memory of a holiday party, brought a smile to his rigid and timeworn face. Offering donations and gifts to the community was the fruit of Scrooge's redemption, revealing that he was a new and joyful person. As beautiful and important as these experiences are, I am convinced that Scrooge doesn't know how to keep Christmas well until he allows his nephew, Fred, to welcome and receive him. Earlier in the story Fred comes to Scrooge's workplace to invite him to spend Christmas with Fred's family. Scrooge's reply is he wants to be left alone. "Keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine." At the end of the story, Scrooge knows his journey will not be complete until he humbly and selflessly reconciles with his family. He approaches Fred's door, a home he has walked past dozens of times, without the courage to knock. He wanders to the dining room and says, "I have come to dinner. Will you let me in Fred?" Fred welcomes him to dinner exuberantly, and a wonderful party ensues.

When the invitation is accepted, Scrooge's redemptive journey is complete. Christmas is an invitation into relationship with God, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ is born so that God might have ears to hear our wants, eyes to see our needs, hand to outstretch on the cross in order to incorporate us into his resurrection, and lips to speak the story of good news, that we might share with the world. When Christ's invitation is accepted, we discover that we have been redeemed. We have neither earned it, nor do we deserve it. It is a gift from God, calling us to respond to God's love by sharing that love in the world. Scrooge knocked at the door and asked to be welcomed, and with joy he was. If Scrooge can be redeemed, then so can we!

I invite to you pray these words after me.

Thank you God,
Thank you for creating me
and loving me unconditionally
Even though there have been challenges
I thank you for all the blessings as well
Come into my heart Lord Jesus
And shape me into the person
you intend me to be.

Amen.

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But 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. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom God favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw

this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

May God add a blessing to the reading, hearing and understanding of this most holy story.