

The Nativity of Our Lord

Isaiah 9: 2-7

Luke 2:1-18

+In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen+

In the opening lines of the movie, *Braveheart*, the narrator sets the stage for a powerful and dramatic chronicle by saying, "I am going to tell you the story of William Wallace (the Scottish freedom fighter). English historians will call me a liar; but, history is always written from the perspective of the victor—of those who win. The truth is larger." Today we are hearing another powerful and dramatic recital of an ancient story, heard over and over, but which never really becomes old, because there is truth to be found here! St. Luke is telling the tale of two powers colliding with one another; Caesar and God, brutal strength and compassionate love; exclusivity versus unlimited Grace and Luke is pretty sure he knows who the victor is. And that alone makes the narrative worth pondering.

What is it about the Nativity that keeps us coming back to listen and absorb. Perhaps the reason it often seems fresh, even if a little strange to modern ears, is that it is not simply a tale about some past set of events, but it is our story as well; it is about our world and our lives, our struggles and our hopes. It is about people with ordinary lives trying to get by in the face of all manner of obstacles, but who yearn for something more; more than surface appearances, and glib political slogans, and shallow personal encounters.

Luke begins by recounting who appears to be in charge. He goes by the names 'Prince of Peace, Lord, the Divine One', Pontifex Maximus (Great Bridge Builder), and while incense is burned in his honor he is worshipped by most of the known world. It is said that he ushered in a Golden Age of Peace, the Pax Romana. His Name? Octavius—later known as the August, thus we get Caesar Augustus. The peace he created came by way of subjugating every one, every culture, and every area his rule encountered. Your significance in that world was measured by how you fit into the Imperial scheme. Opposition was crushed and crucified. Ironically, in so far as he is remembered today it is due to his inclusion in the story of a child born in a flop house in a backwater village in southern Israel. If it had been up to him none of that would have been tolerated and certainly not told to the world. It was a tough time, and those who lived on the fringes of power, with an uncertain future, longed for something more; acceptance and hope.

I have a sneaking suspicion that life is hard enough at some time for all of us, too. We grapple to manage the speed at which the world moves. We do not have the luxury of being Pollyanna. Open any newspaper or turn on your TV and the airways are replete with the latest stories of political intrigue and nonsense or of unexplainable brutality. And even the most solid among us have moments of disappointment and regret, and we know our friends and families do as well. My wife commented on Wednesday, "I have just realized how very much our lives have changed and the future altered over the past year". The truth is we want more. We want deeper and richer than the mere changes and chances of life.

And Luke is telling us that it is just into the middle of all this stuff, that another Prince of Peace is being born. And he is the true Victor. This child of questionable paternity, brought into the world in a guest room, hailed by the outcasts of polite and powerful society (Shepherds), has come into existence as the human face of God. He is born Bethlehem, House of Bread, and the manger suggests he is the Bread of Life which will not grow old or stale. Luke's pointed truth is that God

did not come to put on a few band aides and patches so that we can manage to limp along. He comes even now to embrace and tell us there is something more than we imagine. God does not come to the centers of power and prestige, but to the fringes of life, in the hardest places we walk in order to tell us face to face that He is irrevocably FOR US!!! In the child we call Jesus, God joins our highs and lows, our fears and our hopes, and in doing so he is the Christ. He comes to bring peace and justice; a world where mercy rules; where love conquers and is the victor over fear and animosity.

Whatever reality you can voice, claim, or give a name; that is the place where Christ is being born. It is in joys and celebrations, in failures or successes, in noisiness and silence, gains and losses, in any imaginable context that Jesus is born and brings something more than simple answers; he brings the presence of God, who loves us more than we know how to love ourselves and will be with us in every level of life.

Before long the decorations will be removed, all the food consumed, all the gifts opened and either returned or put to use. Everything will go back to the way it was; OR WILL IT? The real winner/victor of this story is God who is **now with us**. Divine touch can be received from human hands, and divine hope in words. Hear the message: Behold I bring you tiding of Great Joy...For you a Savior is Born—Christ the Lord. Amen+