

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph 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. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And 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.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

¹⁵When 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." ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2:1-20, 2015

God's grace and peace to you on this night of joy when angels sing to the glory of our God in the highest heaven, and proclaim peace in all the earth.

We gather here and in churches around the world on this night to hear the same story about the same angels, the same shepherds, Joseph, Mary and of course this baby named Jesus,

these same particular characters in the story and this particular baby.

This comes after expending a great deal of effort, money and time preparing for this night.

Here at All Saints we spent weeks preparing for our children's Christmas Program, participating in the Christmas parade,

planning how to best assist families needing help during this time of year,

and of course preparing for our services this evening.

Tonight is the culmination of all that activity.

Everything is prepared.

Now we gather together to hear the story, to reflect of what the story means for our lives, how it fits into this world we live in, and we often begin to wonder,

"How does this story make a difference?"

Our world is a pretty messy place. It is full of poverty, injustice, oppression and violence.

Our lives are filled with broken relationships, anger, resentment, addictions, and poor health,

and here we are gathered to hear this story of joy and hope and love.

We gather to hear a story of God's love for this world; for each and every one of you,

and each and every one of those who are not here, who don't know the story and even those who don't believe.

This story is the perfect picture of the angels in the sky telling shepherds about this new born they need to go see and singing praise to God for what He has done,

of Joseph and Mary dressed in their fresh robes with adoration on their faces as they look down at the manger where their new baby boy lies,

and the star shining over the manger casting just the right light on the scene.

We love the Christmas glory, the Christmas tree and visions of sugarplums dancing in our heads.

We love the idea of peace in all the earth

But, how does such a perfect picture fit into our world and lives today?

A picture can be a tricky thing. Not everything is as it may seem when you look at a picture.

I have a nephew, David, who is a photographer. He got started shooting pictures of Remote Control Airplanes in flight and has been published in their trade magazines.

He has expanded his interests to many other areas now, including shooting weddings.

Of course he uses all the latest digital technology to do his work, and he produces some beautiful pictures.

After my son Sean and I finished rebuilding his car,
complete with paint job, new wheels and interior, and a number of
other things hidden under the hood and body,
we went out to the causeway on Dunlawton to have David
take some pictures.

When he took the pictures he would take three shots of each one with different settings he had programmed into his camera.

David told us that would allow him to go back home, load the pictures on his computer and manipulate them some how to create these beautiful photos

with perfectly sharp focus and the exact lighting he wanted to make them the best they could be.

He was even able to take out some of the eye sores in the background like electrical towers and other things that would detract from the scene.

The pictures we got from that day were beautiful.

I wonder if we have not done something similar with the picture we have in our mind about this birth we celebrate tonight,
used a little photo shop on the story so it looks pretty.

Luke goes to some effort to place this event, this particular event into its proper context.

This event happened in a particular point in time in history, in a particular location in Israel, to particular people who had lives to live, and a baby on the way.

Rome occupied Israel. Injustice and oppression were rampant and it was a violent world.

The government, by decree from Emperor Augustus, has called for a census and registration of all citizens,

all this so the government could make sure they were getting all the taxes they were due.

Consequently Joseph and Mary had to leave their home in Nazareth to travel to Bethlehem, some 95 miles away with Mary due to deliver her baby most any time.

Mary and Joseph's lives were in turmoil.

They are not married and Mary is about to have a child.

- The scrutiny of family, friends, neighbors and the church must have been intense.
- By the evidence we have they were alone. There was no family with them on this trip.
- Mary has traveled for days on a donkey to get to Bethlehem. Probably not in a very good mood when they arrived,
 - Only to find there was no place for them to stay.
- Their baby was born in a stable out behind the inn of this small town, Bethlehem. If you have been on a farm before you can imagine what that must have smelled like.
 - No midwife which I am sure Joseph appreciated.
 - No epidural for Mary.

all the troubles and challenges of the real world and a real life for Mary and Joseph.

The world and life of Mary and Joseph was not all that different from our own.

It was filled with challenges, many things out of their control, and then there is this calling from God thing that they have answered which did not make their lives easier, although more full.

But this baby was born!

“I bring 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.”

To you this baby Jesus was born.

The gospel story is very particular about this.

It is Jesus who was born, and He was born for you;
each and every one of you.

THIS God who loved **THIS** nomad Abraham, **THIS** people Israel, **THIS** unwed teenaged mother, **THIS** Mary, **THIS** carpenter, **THIS** Joseph comes to you in **THIS** baby named Jesus--in **THIS** place—on **THIS** night—in the context of **THIS** world—into **THIS** life of yours.

In this story, in Jesus' birth God comes to you, God loves you, God showers you with His grace, forgiveness, hope and the joy of His presence.

This is your God lying in a manger because THIS God is not above coming to THIS world with all its problems to love you like THIS.

What Child Is This is a song we sing on this night every year, and it is one that speaks to who this baby is beyond the night of His birth.

In that song we proclaim that,
“THIS, THIS is Christ the King...”

We also sing,
“Nails, spear shall pierce him through, the cross be borne for me, for you...”

THIS God is King and the one who takes your sin to death with him on the cross.

In a few moments you will meet this God right here in THIS place, at THIS table.

THIS God will say to you, “THIS is my body given for you. THIS is my blood shed for you.”

THIS is how I love you.

You, we,--have all spent much time and effort preparing for this night when God comes, Word made flesh.

My prayer for you is that you hear and believe this message, this birth, is for you and that it touches your heart and changes your life.

Merry Christmas to you and your families.