

Luke 2:1 - 20 The Birth and shepherds. Kladno January 2020

We have just read one of the most delightful passages in the Bible that has an almost universal appeal.

The story is so simple, so true to life, in a sense so tragic, yet so endearing and easily remembered.

But, because of those statements we must never fall into the attitude of relegating this account to children and for many, treat it as any other fairy tale or myth.

We must never be tricked into doing that because this story is not fiction, but an accurate relating of historical events concerning real people in real places. Those from well known rich aristocratic rulers to the ordinary people of Palestine will be found here, many not even named.

At the same time this is not just a matter of dates, time, people and places presented as cold hard fact; it is full of emotion, joy, sadness and the word that I like, wonder.

Glorious wonder. Profound wonder and mystery.

As we read these opening chapters of Luke (and Matthew) we come across some statements that are way beyond our full understanding.

Thus, we too, must come to this passage and the whole of God's revelation as babes who know hardly anything and when we think we have understood some of the great doctrines of God, we will still be babes.

Well then, how do we read and explore this first Christmas?

In faith, in love, in humility, in excited happiness (joy) and wonder... and worship. Little children may do that and so may we!

Why?

Because we are watching God doing something!

In such a way that anyone may look and believe, from the youngest to the oldest in any time and in any place.

Doing something in a way that no one expected, so quietly and almost unnoticed.

Nine months earlier Gabriel told Mary that she had been chosen for an outstanding event that will be the turning point in this world's history.

Mary was to become the mother of the Incarnate Son of God!

B.C. will become A.D.

Then, apart from the visit to Elizabeth and revealing what was happening to Joseph ... **nothing.**

The Babe grows and Mary is obviously pregnant.

After almost nine months we find Mary and Joseph still in Nazareth.

They should be in Bethlehem.

Would it be fair for me to say, not a word from God?

No other visit from Gabriel.

Nothing.

Is this true of us also?

We hear the Gospel. God comes to us and we know that we are born again!

We are so excited.

Yet after that initial joy ... **nothing** ... and often nothing but problems.

So with Joseph and Mary. Here is a big problem.
They have to be in Bethlehem or prophesy fails.
Even the Pharisees and scribes knew that Christ had to come from Bethlehem!

An unbelieving tyrant, Caesar Augustus, suddenly has a brilliant idea of getting more money from his subjects.
Tax them. To make sure all comply, have them go to their birth places and be registered.
That is not the genius of a heathen ruler.

God is working.

The King of kings MUST be born in Bethlehem.

The King of kings WILL be born in Bethlehem.

Think of the dismay, the anguish and the distress for this couple.
Such a long and dangerous journey.
Well, not to worry. Cheer up. Look on the bright side.
They will be safe when they get there.
A nice comfortable room. Clean. Private.

Oh no!

A stinking, unhealthy smelly stable for animals and a food trough for a manger.
Where is the throne?
Where is the welcome?
No room ... anywhere!

Nothing.

They don't hear the angels singing to the shepherds.

Look at the desperate state they are in. Have they been abandoned?

We need to apply this to ourselves.

Here is a couple obviously "called of God" walking faithfully with Him.

Is this true of you too this morning?

Are you aware that God has called you so that you accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour?

Do you know that you are truly saved and are walking with Him day by day?

Have you experienced that peace of God that is beyond our understanding that Paul writes about as something that happens only to Christians?

Phil 4: 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Even so, this goes sadly wrong; nothing seems to meet our expectations.

We pray, but our anxiety remains along with a sense of disappointment.

We are perplexed.

Is this how Christianity is supposed to work?

Where has joy gone?

Don't you think that Joseph and Mary were bewildered, puzzled and perplexed?
Where is God now?

The shepherds, true to their task, keep watch and don't fall asleep! It is at this point that what the angel has to say to the shepherds will be so significant for Joseph and Mary.

2:10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.
For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.
And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, **lying in a manger.**"

Saviour. Christ. Lord. Lying in a manger!
What?

A manger, a dirty feeding trough dug into the earth?
But **THAT IS THE SIGN** – a new-born in an animal trough.
Will you find any other baby in that situation in Bethlehem?

That's humility.

The Son of God, who created this universe humbled Himself and entered His own creation as a weak, tiny, vulnerable infant - to rescue those who were corrupted and ruined by sin – LAYING IN AN ANIMAL FEEDING TROUGH!
The shepherds surprise arrival confirm this!
Enter the smelly shepherds.
Excited shepherds who have so much to tell.

Luke 2:17 Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child.

But what is your attitude to these events?
Pretty lights, tinsel, presents, perhaps tinged with sadness, missing loved ones and a sense of loneliness?
For Mary and Joseph initially it was mockery; unmarried and pregnant!
No room.
Rejection.
Silence - not a word from heaven.
But God is working. He has not stopped.

Now think of the amazing confirmation for Mary and Joseph.
Shepherds are able to share with them and confirm things that they thought only a tiny handful of close relatives knew.
This Babe is the/their Saviour, the/their Christ, the/their Lord.
These shepherds are strangers from the mountains.
But they know who this Child is.
Do you?