

“ADVENT ... FULFILLED!”

Christmas Eve, December 24, 2008

Luke 2:1-20

Introduction:

For four weeks now we've been preparing for Christmas – and for the return of Christ. Tonight marks the end of the Season of Advent ... but, hopefully not the end of our on-going preparations for Jesus fully to live within our lives; for us to live fully within the Spirit of the risen Christ; and for us to be ready for the eventual return of Jesus who will then reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

I've been building our Advent Season around the candles on the Advent Wreath. Each candle has a theme, and that theme became our 'theme of the week' the past four weeks ... sort of like a flavor of the week .. but different.

Tonight we lit the Christ Candle because we are focusing on the birth of Jesus. As St. John puts it in tomorrow morning's gospel lesson Jesus was the life who was the “Light of the all people”. In him there is no darkness at all. In him all are enlightened.

Tonight's Gospel lesson offers us glimpses into how the birth of Jesus so fulfills the four themes of Advent: preparation, prophecy, joy, and faith:

1. **Regarding Preparation:** In our lesson we see evidence of God working in history waiting for Caesar Augustus to order the registration of people that would require Joseph to

go to Bethlehem – the city of his ancestors. Of course he took Mary, his ‘betrothed’, who was “great with child”.

We also see evidence of God’s preparations in the fact that Jesus had to be born in a stable – because the Inn was full. You might think that was due to a lack of preparation on Joseph’s part, but it didn’t catch God by surprise. Do you think it was part of God’s preparations that the Savior of the world would be born in the most humble of circumstances instead of in a palace, or even in a solid middle-class family? I do. I think that is just like God. God making sure there is no one beneath the status of Jesus. There is no one who can say, “Not even Jesus can identify with my lowly status”. God ensured that the future King of Kings would also be born in a place that would symbolize his earthly role as the most humble and meek servant. What a great God!

If Jesus were born today in our country his father would probably be an out-of-work construction carpenter, maybe even (temporarily) homeless. Maybe Mary would give birth in a Salvation Army shelter. Even that would probably be too good for the purpose God was establishing. Jesus might be born in an out-of-way back alley, tucked away behind some non-descript brick buildings. Joseph might have made a shelter for her between a couple of large

metal dumpsters. He might have found a discarded mattress or an old couch, or packing material, or old newspapers – anything for Mary to lie down on and have some shelter from the wind and a small measure of privacy. There, out of the wind, and with as much comfort as the circumstances allow; seen only by her fiancée, some alley cats, and a couple of stray mutts, the Savior would enter His world as a helpless, but loved infant.

We might not understand God's ways, but God is never caught by surprise; not prepared because of circumstances.

2. Regarding Prophecy: Our lesson says that the Angel of the Lord stood before the Shepherds and announced that, *“to you is born today, in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah.”* The title Messiah originates in Old Testament prophecies about one who is to come that will be God's enlightened One; a King, a prophet; a suffering servant, a warrior, a savior, a righteous one; the judge of men's souls. He would be one who would deliver his people from those who seek to destroy them. All those prophetic words were uniquely fulfilled in the person of Jesus, born in Bethlehem in order also to fulfill Scripture. It was no accident Jesus was born in the manner he was; and it will be no accident when he returns in the manner God chooses. His return, also, will

fulfill abundant Scripture about the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Regarding Joy. Look how many references there are in tonight's lesson about Joy? The angel to the shepherds says, "*I am bringing you good news of great joy...*". And then the joyful exclamation of the heavenly hosts proclaiming, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, ...".

4. Regarding Faith. Our lesson states: "*Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart*". Mary received, and believed, the initial announcement from Gabriel that she was going to become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. And then the miracle happened - she was pregnant. Then, for nine months she kept believing, even when she didn't fully understand what was going on.

One day, Joseph said, 'climb aboard dear Mary – great with child and ready to deliver any day. You're going to have to ride this donkey for the next two or three days because we have to go to Bethlehem. . . Don't you dare look at me in that tone of voice!'. Then, there wasn't even a room for her in the local Motel 6, or a bed to lie on, nor a mid-wife, or mother, or aunt, or sister to attend her. In a barn, one stall over from the animals, on what passed for the cleanest straw available, with only a nervous man to fret over her; Mary gave birth to a son, wrapped him in strips of cloth, and laid

him in a feeding trough. I wonder what Mary tore up to create swaddling cloths for baby Jesus?

Yet, she held onto her faith in God. Somehow she trusted that God was behind all those strange circumstances. She had the patience deep faith brings to fold all those events and the words of angels, the visits of shepherds, and astrologers from Persia, an unexpected relocation to Egypt, a sudden move back home, an old man who prophesied over her baby when she took him to be circumcised, she folded all that into her heart and patiently waited for time to pass bringing with it understanding.

I suppose it was only later – at the entrance to an empty tomb - that God's will really became clear to her. Mary lived over 30 years pondering all those things in her heart before finally, fully understanding why that baby – her baby –had to be born when, where, and how he was. Advent was fulfilled for her.

Has Advent been fulfilled for you?

What discoveries about yourself have you made this Advent? Have you yet learned that you can trust God with the details of your life? These are tough times in our nation and people are looking for answers about life that make sense. Many people feel that their government, their country, the financial system, their employer, their savings

account, the bank, the medical insurance industry, the politicians, have all let them down. And they have. People fail each other every day. It's the product of being sinners – we just can't seem to get it right all the time. So why are so many people upset?

Certainly they are upset because of the magnitude of the financial crisis. However, underlying that is a greater spiritual problem. We don't trust God like we should with the everyday details of our lives. When we place our faith in people and institutions more than we place our trust in God we are practicing idolatry and setting ourselves up for major disappointment.

That's why this is a great time for us to invite people to come to church. People want to hear good news. We have good news to declare. We can help people fulfill Advent in their own lives. There are people looking for a way to connect with God. If we love them, pray for them, and invite them to come, see, taste and know that the Lord is good, they will come; and their lives can be forever changed.

Has Advent been fulfilled for you? Are you ready for Christmas – for Jesus to be born, or reborn, in the manger of your heart and life? Will you unwrap Jesus?