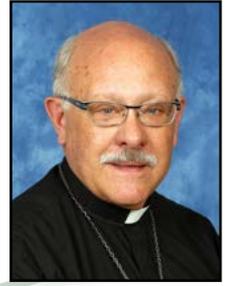




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 18, 2016

The Angel Speaks to the Shepherds' CURIOSITY

Luke 2:8-15

Advent, we all know by now, means "coming." In each of these weeks, we have been about the work of waiting. Waiting...we are accustomed to having to wait: we wait in line, in traffic, for news, for visitors to come and, sometimes, to go. We wait for time to make a decision and, when made, often wait for it to unfold.

Yes we wait, and we work a day, on a new project, a process; wait for a package, a time to speak, a time to remind others you are tired of waiting, a time to speak the truth in love, a meeting, a place to make time for forgiveness, for the embrace of peace. Sometime, you just have to wait.

In these past weeks, Zechariah waited in fear, Joseph with confusion, Mary with doubt...but they waited, nonetheless, until the PROMISE GRACIOUSLY GIVEN becomes the PROMISE FAITHFULLY RECEIVED.

Today, a bit out of sequence, "The Angel, [Angels] speak and sing to shepherd's curiosity. A story told only in Luke and within the 20 verses which narrate the birth...in human history...Augustus,, the Caesar, was in charge, it seemed, a time of registration for taxation; after Luke presents the background story with angel singing and prophetic words, no trumpet fanfare, just a very young woman trekking from Nazareth to the city of David called Bethlehem, "house of bread."

Luke plays all of this with striking simplicity: Mary gave birth, swaddled the child and laid him in a manger. Remember? No place for them in the inn. How could it be? Amidst all of the striking historical setting...this birth becomes the pivot for all of human history.

How does it happen that this captures our attention, rivets us into a time when it seems the world prepares, shops, travels, sets the stage for days of "time off" to remember this moment when the first to hear are a gaggle of shepherd's who are waiting for dawn, night watch, homeless men with their sheep and the heaven's open, to them, as the womb of Mary opened for the birth of a firstborn son.

Good news! Who doesn't long for, wait for news that is good? At first they are terrified, trembling like Zechariah in the Temple. "Good news, great joy, all people." To shepherds?

The glory of the LORD. What a birth announcement! David's city would not mean much to the shepherds. Savior, Lord, Messiah. The titles might not be easily defined by them, but face to face with an angel, given a sign, they go, with the WORDS OF THE ANGEL and MULTITUDE OF THE HEAVENLY HOSTS praising God with utter abandonment,

"God's glory,
from highest heaven,
and peace to those on whom he finds favor."

Sudden silence and curiosity. ?????????????????? What does this mean? And they determined to !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! "go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place which the Lord (Note that they confessed the name!) has made known to us."

Recall that they went with haste. Having heard, they had to see. With no thought for the fate of the sheep in their care, they leave their livelihood so see a child wrapped in cloth lying in what may have been a feed trough. Like those first called by Jesus who left everything to follow along His way of servant ministry, to the Cross, the Empty Tomb, and to mission we share in this time of witness and celebration anew at the birth of Jesus.

We have lived this Advent in time where the age old questions have been set in the words "fear," "confusion," "doubt," and "curiosity."

But for this last week of Advent on the cusp of a new year filled with change and opportunity, new paths to walk in our callings in Christ...in the style of the shepherd's story..."What do you seek in this time?" "Where do you find God?" Where does God find you in this season of life?"

I have been struck by the theme of grace...in the lives of dear old Zechariah and Elizabeth; Joseph, a just man; Mary, newly pregnant engaged woman. And those shepherds who would hear, went to see, and left to tell all. The least expected evangelists in a world where power would not be sought in a small city, let alone the unlikely two who would birth and help grow the Son of God.

God is just always reaching out to enfold, forgive, and set free. In a time when the breaking news is too often filled with the themes of Advent, we are called to listen to a new script, counter-narrative about what it means to be part of God's plan, in a redemptive community where reconciliation, being brought into each other's lives to serve and live in Christ.

We are those who carry the Jesus of Mary and the Christ of faith which calls us to faithfully receive the trust to be Christ to one another and to those we meet and walk beside each day.

It was Luther's point that when I meet you...when I meet you I meet and honor the Christ in you. And I am called to treat and be with you as if you were the Christ of God.

We are those, Paul reminds, the church in Rome, the congregation of Saint Andrew's, who are "called to be saints" and who find and live grace and peace from the God, we call Father, that we know in the Lord Jesus Christ."

Our call in these next few days? A quiet serenity. A peaceful hearing of the story. To listen, to see, to be the Church that is not afraid, and when things are ☹. We know that in God's good time, all will be well☺.

But for now, let it be our story, our song that as we come again to celebrate the birthday of Jesus, the One whom I like to remember made our home his home, we know that it is truth that...

All the Earth is Hopeful. The Savior comes at last!
A virgin mother will bear Emmanuel,
she conceived him God with us, our brother whose birth
restores hope and courage to children of this earth.
We first saw Jesus a baby in a crib.
This same Lord Jesus today has come to live
anew in our world; he is present in neighbors we see
our Jesus is with us and ever sets us free.

He is coming soon. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.