

WILLETTON UNITING CHURCH
WHERE LOVE AND HOPE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

REDISCOVER INNER HOPE

December 25, 2024

(Christmas Day)

READINGⁱ

Luke 2:8-21

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them,

“Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing 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. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”*

When 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.”

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

When the eighth day came, it was time to circumcise the child, and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

REFLECTION (Rev. Toby Keva)

For those I haven't met before, let me tell you that I have two boys: one is seven and the other is four. Like most parents, when they were still in their infancy and during their toddler years, I suffered from 'parental bias'. You know what I mean: I used to think that my sons were better than other children in every aspect of life; that they were destined to do great things in life and change the world!

So, every time Abinaya (my oldest son) did a big kick when he played footy, I always jumped to the conclusion that he was destined to be a footy star! And every time Arka (my youngest) started dancing and singing, and enjoyed becoming the center of attention of others around him, I thought that he was destined to become a celebrity!

Well, my late Mother used to think like that about me. I guess now it's my turn with my children. In our eyes, our children are always the best!

Obviously, this is very subjective and our children don't always turn out to be the kind of people that we hope for. But, we still love them for who they are.

That, however, is not my point today. My point today is more about the hope that a newborn baby or an infant or a toddler brings to the people around her, especially her own family.

A young child is like a blank canvass. She is full of potentials. She reminds us of the time when the world is full of possibilities.

This is the reason why Christmas is so meaningful for so many people. The birth of baby Jesus represents that kind of hopefulness that we all long for.

In our Bible reading today, this hopefulness is encapsulated in the proclamation of the host of angels to the shepherds. Let's hear again their words: "I am bringing 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."ⁱⁱ

"Good news of great joy!" that's what it's all about. A newborn child is often good news that brings great joy to all around her because the hope of her parents and family for a better future rests on her.

It was no different with baby Jesus. When Jesus was born, his people were in a condition that the prophet Isaiah would describe as those who "walked in darkness" and who "lived in the land of the shadow of death".ⁱⁱⁱ This baby Jesus was destined to be the Saviour, the Messiah, the Lord who would free the people from all kinds of darkness from within or without!

Now, obviously when he was still a baby, Jesus had not saved the world yet. But he brought with him the hope for the time of liberation of all oppressions in the future. He reminded all of what could be and would be. No wonder that the angels called his birth "good news of great joy for all the people!"^{iv}

Christmas is indeed an invitation for us to discover our 'inner-hopefulness' once more, represented in this baby Jesus in the manger.

I think this was the reason why Jesus once said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3 NRSV) Christmas is thus an invitation for us to, once again, see everything around us the way a child sees; to marvel at everything and everyone; to see the world and our life with a new kind of naivety; to see the world and our life as full of potentials once again.

The great physicist, Albert Einstein, once said, “There are only two ways to live your life. One is though nothing is a miracle. The other is though everything is a miracle.”

Viktor Frankl, the great Austrian psychiatrist once said, “life holds a potential meaning under any conditions, even the most miserable ones.”^v He knew what he was talking since he survived the concentration camp, even though he lost his father, mother, and brother in the holocaust.

That’s why, the true symbol of Christmas should always be the baby in the manger, not an old chubby man with a white beard! (No offense intended to all chubby old men with white beards out there!) The old bearded man focuses on giving away gifts that are based on punishment and rewards. He, inadvertently, turns Christmas into a consumeristic frenzy.

The baby in the manger, on the other hand, brings fresh hope that even the rugged shepherds could relate to. Last Sunday, we heard how, in Jesus’ time, shepherds were nothing like our modern–day farmers. Shepherds then were not as well regarded and respected. Other people often treated the shepherds with suspicion because they were often seen like vagabonds or thieves. The shepherds also lived outside of major population areas like cities or towns.^{vi}

And, if these ‘dodgy’ shepherds could find new hope in this baby in the manger, no one else is out of bound.

This is indeed good news of great joy for all!

Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. When do you or what situation that makes you feel the most hopeless?
2. What needs to happen for you to feel hopeful once again?
3. Can you do anything about it?
4. Which part of the Christmas story can help you find hope again?

ⁱ New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

ⁱⁱ Luke 2:10-11 NRSV

ⁱⁱⁱ “The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.” (Isaiah 9:2 NRSV)

^{iv} Luke 2:10 NRSV

^v Frankl, Viktor E (2013). *Man's Search for Meaning: The classic tribute to hope from the Holocaust.* Ebury Publishing. Kindle Edition.

^{vi} Act for Peace Christmas Bowl Resources, Christmas Day, Week 6: 25 December 2024, Author: Reverend John Gilmore.