

CHRISTMAS SUMMARY SERMON 2019

SCRIPTURE LESSON LUKE 2:1-20

It doesn't seem that we can have anything today that somehow doesn't get wrapped in controversy and this even comes down to story of the birth of Jesus. For my purposes this day I'm not concerned about that. I remember in one parish I served we took the week of summer Bible School and went around the area making a slide show of the Nativity story, using the kids as the various characters. Since it was mainly a farming community it wasn't hard to find a donkey, some sheep and cattle. The one church where I lived had an old barn out back with a real manger in it and there was plenty of clean straw to put in it. The girl that played Mary had never ridden a donkey so when we threw her up on it she was more than a little nervous. When it came to filming the scene with the Baby in a manger I shot the picture using a whitewashed field stone wall as the background. After we showed it the night of the Christmas program a woman came up to compliment me on the pictures and said of the scene at the manger how beautiful it was claiming, "That was exactly how it was." Now neither she nor I had ever been to Bethlehem to know how it is but it sounded good. We all have our visions of the real Nativity Scene.

Carol has many nativity scenes, many made in different countries by local crafts folk. None are identical and many reflect the native culture they were made in. The only record we have of the birth of Jesus is the one from Luke 2. We don't even know when it happened, except it probably wasn't in mid-winter. But that is not the point for what we do at Christmas time nor is it the meaning of the story as it appears in scripture. One point of the story as Luke tells it seems to be to demonstrate that the birth of Jesus fits with the Old Testament prophecies telling of the Messiah and how Jesus fits with them. He is born in the line of the great King David. He is of the line of Jesse, just as the prophets said he would be. He was born in the town of David again just as the prophets said he would be. He is declared by God to be the Messiah through the message of the Angels to the shepherds. It is in that message we find the purpose for the event. It is God's intent to offer to the people of the world, through the coming of the Messiah, "PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TO ALL PEOPLE."

As I pointed out at the beginning of this message, we haven't accomplished that yet. Sadly even in the church we find things to argue over in this story, let alone its point. We argue over how it should be celebrated and when it should be. Thus in the end the goal of peace for all people become impossible to achieve because "those people" aren't doing things the right way, the way they should do it, the way we do it. Too often in many congregations we do "it" that way because Rev. SO and SO said that is the way it should be done or some committee of church experts long ago and far away said that is the way it should be done. So we are required to do it that way because they said that is the way God said it should be done. I once served Immanuel Church, not Emmanuel Church and don't ever spell it with an "E". How many people realize the difference comes from whether we use a Greek Translation or a Hebrew. And in the midst of the squabbling the message of the Angels, that does come from God of Peace is lost. When the reason for Jesus' birth is reduced to only personal salvation and the message of bringing the world Peace on Earth is lost, lost with it is the real, "Reason for the Season."

This Christmas let us all focus on the real reason and work in our lives for peace with all people, no matter who they are, where they are from and what religion they claim. Rather let us focus on are they being treated in a way that we would want to be treated. If we were in their lives what would we be trying to do? Then let us consider how we can make God's message of the Angels come true in Christ's Name.