**Reflection for December 20, 2020 – A Most Familiar Story**

**Based On Matthew 1: 1-25; Luke 2:1-7;**

**Prayer:**

Angels visits, promises of a miracle birth, A Holy Child, the son of God who would bring Hope, Peace, Joy and Love back into the world, the coming of a new realm, the Kingdom. An infant lies in a manger. Shepherds in the fields at night get incredible news in a divine way and visitors from far away arrive with gifts.

 Christ’s arrival is a reminder of so much promise. We celebrate the infant’s birth with incredible delight. Many Millions of people around the world are captivated by this special and unique birth story. It is a time for great celebration.

 It is also somewhat incongruous really when we consider how many churches are struggling to maintain enough members just to keep the lights on. The predominantly secular society doesn’t want anything to do with “The Church,” but they believe in Christmas, the promise of the child born to a poor, rather ordinary couple. And for most adults at least, it is not about Santa and presents. There is something else going on.

 We finished out Advent Book study last week. I mentioned during last Sunday’s reflection that a few of us were reviewing the “Birth of Jesus For Progressive Christians,” by Rev. Donald Schmidt. One of the things we all realized in the process, was that there are a lot of inconsistencies in the different Gospel Narratives. It appeared to us that it was the author’s intent to point that out. We learned that the birth narratives stories might not be “historical” descriptions of actual events. Perhaps this is not surprising news to many of you.

 In Matthew’s Gospel an angel visits Joseph in a dream. The angel tells Joseph not to hesitate to get married as Mary’s birth is spirit conceived. In Luke’s account the angel doesn’t visit Joseph, he visits Mary in person saying ***“Good morning! Your beautiful with God’s beauty, Beautiful inside and out! God be with you.”***

Biblical Scholars suggest that Mary and Joseph were probably housed in a guestroom rather than a stable when Mary needed to deliver the baby. That is how things were done during the day and in the custom of the time. There we no “Inns” in the sense of how we think today – the “Holiday Inn,” the “Comfort Inn,” or the like. It is also unlikely that Mary would have been left alone to give birth. It is almost a certainty that she would have been given help by other local women. And of course, animals were common in homes at the time, so to mention animals about was quite normal. The stable scene is likely only the narrator’s image.

And Jesus’ birth date is most likely not December 25. This date probably came about as a result of missionaries in Europe and the seeming disappearance of the Sun around December 21. Praying for the sun’s return may have been the reason December 25th was chosen. And of course, a very big question, how can a virgin become pregnant?

 There are of course other bits and pieces one could look at and ponder. The overarching question is, how do we feel about the apparent inconsistencies? How important are the facts to us? How critical are the events as related in the gospels around Jesus’ birth to our understanding of his Divinity, his Prophetic Wisdom, his Healing Ministry, his Unconditional Love for all of humanity.

 Everyone in our group study said, to dispute the facts in the stories really wasn’t all that important. It made no difference to them in recognizing who Jesus was and is. The Gospels give us possible accounts to describe incredible life-altering and life-giving examples of hope for the world in a time when it was most needed. The same can be said for today.

I wondered about that when writing this reflection yesterday. What does Christ’s birth mean for me today? Do I celebrate a new birth within me, within my life at this time of year when I focus on the coming of Jesus? It seems to me that Advent poses that question. I think really it leads us to that possibility.

Once again we look to where hope, peace, love and joy are given space to blossom and grow. There is always space for possibility. Jesus’ birth reminds us that, and catapults us past our negative experiences, past our doubt, past our concern and past our grief. Where we land is of our own choosing.

 If I land on Hope, I make a decision to give birth to the understanding that climate change and global warming can be addressed. I avoid running away from an issue and speak the words Jesus would speak. If I land on Hope, I continue to do what I can to support pandemic relief and resist centering on my own needs. I work to build the promise of healing.

If I land on Peace, I advocate for the humble heart. I stand with the women who speak for the # Me Too movement and I abhor carding of black Canadians walking our city streets. I’m seeking protection for children’s safety as they walk to and from school in Palestine and I’m praying for worshippers in Mosques who fear for their lives.

If I land on joy I hold in my heart the delight of a toddler’s face casting snow angels on a brisk winder morning and the glee expressed when the man in the red suit leaves presents under the Christmas Tree. I celebrate joy in a “drive by” birthday greeting to a good friend or a hot coffee under a blanket while watching a favourite movie. When I land on joy I smile at the dusting of snow on the trees outside and the brilliant blue sky of the morning sunrise.

If I land on love, I celebrate and give thanks for those that call to say hi, share a good wish or offer a thank you. I celebrate a special card that comes in the mail. Landing on love reminds me to be generous, sincere, kind and thoughtful. It reminds me to try and be forgiving and patient.

Standing on Hope, Peace, Joy and Love reminds me of a baby born a long while ago cast into a time where there were huge expectations. Huge obstacles lay in the way of success. Unimaginable impediments threatened to block the path. But there would be joy in many a heart as good news spread. The magic of unconditional love was being noticed. A vision of peace began to peek through grey clouds. Hope sprang forth and hope continues in our time, today, December 20 in the year 2020.

It is such a familiar story, the Birth of Christ. Most any child can tell it. They know of Mary in a manger with cattle and sheep about. They know of angels around. They know of a new baby wrapped up in a blanket of some sort. They know about “Wise Men” with gifts and a star that was followed to the birth place, a stable somewhere in a town called Bethlehem.

They don’t concern themselves with facts about a virgin birth, customs of the day, potential accommodation, mid wives or what it must have been like to travel pregnant on a donkey. It doesn’t matter to them. All that matters is the baby Jesus. They love the Baby Jesus and he loves them back.

Sometimes I tend to forget what incredible promise the recollection of Birth Story of Jesus brings to us. It is more, much more than a feel-good story. With the coming again of Jesus we celebrate possibility of our Advent time becoming a reality. We celebrate Hope, Peace, Joy and Love in the world. And if we allow the spirit of the Holy to envelop us at this time we can give birth to those incredible gifts too.

Let those gifts flow through you.

Thanks for listening this morning, Amen