

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD – CHRISTMAS EVE I 12-24-21

ISAIAH 9:2-7; PSALM 96; TITUS 2:11-14; LUKE 2:1-20

TONIGHT I AM GOING TO READ YOU A STORY – you first heard this story 2016, but it is special for tonight. IT WAS WRITTEN BY AN ANGLICAN PRIEST – REV PETER FISHER FOR XMAS 2009. THE TITLE IS “A SHEPHERD TELLS HIS STORY.”

THAT WAS A NIGHT! I CAN REMEMBER IT LIKE IT WAS YESTERDAY. IT WAS A COLD NIGHT UP ON THE HILLS, AND A BIT WINDY. NOT REALLY FULL ON WINTER, BUT NOT A NICE NIGHT TO BE SLEEPING UNDER THE STARS. EVEN US SHEPHERDS LOOK FORWARD TO A NICE WARM BED YOU KNOW, NOT THAT WE GET TO SLEEP IN ONE THAT OFTEN. THERE WERE FIVE OF US, MAYBE SIX. IT’S SO LONG AGO. THERE WE WERE SITTING TOGETHER BETWEEN A FEW ROCKS TRYING TO KEEP OUT OF THE WIND, AND KEEP A BIT OF WARMTH SO THAT WE COULD GET SOME SLEEP. I’D JUST NODDED OFF WHEN SOMEONE SWITCHED A LIGHT ON. THERE IT WAS, THIS KIND OF PERSON WITH WINGS, JUST SORT OF HANGING THERE. NO, DON’T LOOK AT ME LIKE

THAT – IT’S NOT ONE OF THEM UFO STORIES – WE DON’T HAVE TIME TO WORRY ABOUT THEM – THIS REALLY HAPPENED – IT DID! THERE WERE FIVE OF US, OR WAS IT SIX – WE ALL SAW IT – THE SAME THING – JUST THERE IN THE AIR ABOVE OUR HEADS ALMOST, IT WAS GLOWING – NOT BRIGHT LIKE THE SUN, SO YOU COULDN’T LOOK AT IT - MORE LIKE A GIANT CANDLE, BUT THE FLAME HAD NO BRIGHT BIT IN THE MIDDLE, BUT THERE WAS LIGHT ALL AROUND TOO – NOT LIKE THE DAY TIME, CAUSE IT WAS STILL DARK EVERYWHERE ELSE.

ANYWAY WE’D HAVE ALL BEEN BEHIND THE ROCKS, BUT WE WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE AND THE ROCKS WERE JUST ABOUT BIG ENOUGH TO SLEEP AGAINST, NOT REALLY BIG ENOUGH TO HIDE US SO WE JUST KIND OF FROZE TO THE SPOT. FUNNY THING WAS THE SHEEP DIDN’T EVEN NOTICE, JUST KEPT GRAZING AND BLEATING LIKE NORMAL. WE GOT OUR BREATH BACK AND OLD JOSEPH SAID “THAT’S AN ANGEL THAT IS.”

“DO NOT BE AFRAID” HE (OR SHOULD THAT BE SHE, OR IT? – I DON’T KNOW – NOT THAT IT MATTERS, SO I’LL KEEP SAYING

“HE” CAUSE IT SOUNDS RIGHT SHOWHOW). TALK ABOUT ASKING THE IMPOSSIBLE. WE DON’T SCARE EASY YOU KNOW, WE HAVE TO FIGHT BIG BEARS AND CHASE OFF WOLVES AND ALL IF WE’RE GONNA KEEP THE SHEEP SAFE, BUT WE’D NEVER SEEN THE LIKE OF THAT BEFORE AND WE DIDN’T KNOW WHAT HE WANTED. PROBABLY US, NOT THE SHEEP – THEY WERE STILL EATING - ITS WHAT THEY DO BEST.

“I BRING YOU GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY THAT WILL BE FOR ALL THE PEOPLE” HE SAID. WELL IT WOULD HAVE TO BE FOR EVERYONE FOR US TO GET TO HEAR ABOUT IT. THEY DON’T TELL US ANYTHING WHEN WE GO DOWN INTO TOWN, IN FACT THEY DO THEIR LEVEL BEST TO KEEP WELL CLEAR OF US. YOU’D THINK WE WERE LEPERS, THIEVES OR MURDERERS PERHAPS. WE’RE NOT ALLOWED IN THE TEMPLE SO WE DON’T EVEN GET TO HEAR THE NOTICES. ONE DAY THEY’LL INVENT CNN, THEN THERE WON’T BE ANY NEED FOR ANGELS SCARING THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS OUT OF PEOPLE.

BUT WE DO KNOW ENOUGH, 'CAUSE WE'RE NOT STUPID. WE KNOW THE SCRIPTURES, WE KNOW ALL ABOUT ANGELS AND THE DIFFERENT FORMS THEY TAKE, WE HEAR THE STORIES OF HOW GOD USED TO TALK TO US JEWS – THEY TEACH ALL THE CHILDREN ALL OF THOSE STORIES. THAT WAS HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO, BUT WE UPSET HIM SOMEHOW AND HE HASN'T SENT ANY OF HIS MESSENGERS FOR GETTING ON TO 20 GENERATIONS – SO AN ANGEL NOW WAS SOMETHING SPECIAL – BUT THERE WASN'T ANY TIME FOR US TO DECIDE WHICH OF US WAS THE NEXT PROPHET. GOD WAS SPEAKING TO US – ALL FIVE, OR WAS IT SIX, IT'S A LONG TIME AGO. HE WAS SPEAKING TO US – JUST US AFTER ALL THIS TIME. WELL THAT'S HOW IT LOOKED, OF COURSE, HE'D BEEN SPEAKING TO LOTS OF OTHER PEOPLE AND DOING LOTS OF OTHER THINGS TOO, BUT WE DIDN'T KNOW THAT THEN. ALRIGHT, I'LL GET TO THE NEWS, CAUSE I KNOW YOU WANT TO HEAR IT. “TODAY IN THE TOWN OF DAVID, A SAVIOUR HAS BEEN BORN TO YOU; HE IS CHRIST THE LORD. THIS WILL BE A SIGN TO YOU: YOU WILL FIND A BABY WRAPPED IN CLOTHS AND LYING IN A MANGER.” HE

SPOKE TO US IN GREEK, BUT THAT DIDN'T MATTER, WE ALL KNEW WHAT IT MEANT. MESSIAH IS HERE, NOW, IN OUR LIFETIME – DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE, I DIDN'T THINK I'D LIVE TO SET IT, BUT WE ALL KNEW THE PROPHECIES, WE ALL KNEW WHAT IT MEANT. OLD ISIAH GAVE US THE BEST ONES, BUT HE WENT ON A BIT, SO I'LL GIVE YOU THE HIGHLIGHTS:

“THEREFORE THE LORD HIMSELF SHALL GIVE YOU A SIGN; BEHOLD, A VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE, AND BEAR A SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL.” A BIT FURTHER HE SAYS: “THE PEOPLE WALKING IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT; ON THOSE LIVING IN THE LAND OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, A LIGHT HAS DAWNED. FOR TO US A CHILD IS BORN, TO US A SON IS GIVEN, AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE ON HIS SHOULDERS. AND HE WILL BE CALLED WONDERFUL COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERYLASTING FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE. OF THE INCREASE OF HIS GOVERNMENT AND PEACE THERE WILL BE NO END. HE WILL REIGN ON DAVID'S THRONE AND OVER HIS KINGDOM, ESTABLISHING AND UPHOLDING IT WITH JUSTICE

AND RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM THAT TIME ON AND FOREVER. THE SEAL OF THE LORD ALMIGHTY WILL ACCOMPLISH THIS.” BEFORE WE HAD A CHANCE TO MOVE OR EVEN DISCUSS WHAT TO DO NEXT THE WHOLE SKY LIGHTS UP – ALL SORTS OF CREATURES, WINGS, WHEELS AND EYES EVERYWHERE, AND ALL OF THEM SINGING AT THE TOP OF THEIR VOICES: “GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE TO MEN ON WHOM HIS FAVOUR RESTS.” THAT’S ALL THEY SUNG – BUT NOT ONCE OR ONE AT A TIME – SEEMED TO GON FOR AGES – NOT THAT I MIND, I LIKE A GOOD CONCERT AS MUCH AS TH NEXT MAN, AND THESE WERE PERFECTLY IN TUNE AND PERFECTLY IN TIME – HEAVENLY IT WAS. OH YES, OF COURSE IT WAS HEAVENLY, THAT’S THE POINT. SO WHO MIGHT GOD’S FAVOUR REST ON THEN? (I’LL TELL YOU MY THEORY LATER, IF YOU’VE GOT TIME.) THEN JUST AS SUDDENLY AS IT STARTED THEY WERE GONE. JUST A FEW THOUSAND STARS IN A DARK SKY AND THE SOUND OF THE SHEEP BLEATING IN THE GUSTS OF WIND.

THE MESSIAH IS HERE – NOW AS A BABY AND JUST A SHORT WALK AWAY, JUST DOWN THERE SOMEWHERE AT THE BOTTOM OF THOSE HILLS. AND WE'RE UP HERE WITH A LOAD OF SHEEP. WE MUST GO AND SEE GOD'S SON – ALL OF US AGREED. I HAD FIVE SONS YOU KNOW, OR WAS IT SIX, IT'S SO LONG AGO. WE MUST PAY OUR RESPECTS AND WELCOME HIM INTO THE WORLD. SUPPOSE I SHOULD SAY WELCOME HIM INTO HIS WORLD, BUT IT SOUNDS STRANGE EVEN NOW. WE HAD A BIT OF DISCUSSION AND RECKONED THAT GOD WOULD LOOK AFTER THE SHEEP FOR ONE NIGHT. IT WASN'T AS DIFFICULT FINDING THE BABY AS WE EXPECTED. BETHLEHEM IS A VERY SMALL PLACE REALLY. WE WERE ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF TOWN TOO, AND THERE WERE LOTS OF OLD WOMEN FUSSING AROUND MAKING SURE HE WAS OK. WE STARTED OFF TO BETHLEHEM SINGING THE ANGELS SONG "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST AND PEACE ON EARTH TO HIS FAVOURED MEN" OVER AND OVER. WE MUST HAVE SEEMED LIKE A DRUNKEN MOB OR RELIGIOUS FANATICS, BUT THE MESSIAH'S HERE AND WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO ACTUALLY SEE HIM – REALLY IN

THE FLESH AND ALL. WE GOT SHUSSED BY THE OLD WOMEN, BUT THAT DIDN'T STOP US SINGING. WE DIDN'T SHUT UP UNTIL WE SAW HIM, THEN ALL OF US JUST KNELT IN FRONT OF HIM IN AWE. THIS IS GOD IN PERSON, WRAPPED IN CLOTHS AND SLEEPING PEACEFULLY. WE LISTENED TO HIS MUM MARY TELL HER STORY, MORE VISITS BY ANGELS, GOD HAD BEEN BUSIER THAN WE COULD HAVE IMAGINED, AND THEN THEY HAD THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM TO REGISTER IN THE CENSUS. THE TOWN WAS HEAVING WITH PEOPLE – FULLER THAN I'VE EVER SEEN IT. SO IT'S NO SURPRISE SHE ENDED UP OUT IN THE BACK WHERE THE ANIMALS USUALLY ARE. JOSEPH, MARY'S SOON TO BE HUSBAND WAS THERE TOO, SO WE HEARD ABOUT MORE ANGELS. THEY WERE GOING TO CALL THE BABY JESUS! WE GOT BACK TO THE SHEEP JUST AFTER FIRST LIGHT AND HAD A QUICK COUNT, CAUSE IF THERE WERE ANY MISSING, EXPLAINING WHY WE WERE AWAY FROM OUR JOBS MIGHT HAVE BEEN A BIT TRICKY. PERHAPS WE ARE THE ONES WHO HAD GOD'S FAVOUR – CAUSE THEY WERE ALL STILL THERE – EVERY

LAST ONE. SO THERE YOU HAVE IT – THE STORY OF THE MOST REMARKABLE NIGHT IN MY LIFE - ..

NOW DO YOU HAVE A MINUTE OR TWO MORE ... I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO HEAR MY THEORY ON WHO HAS GOD'S FAVOUR. I RECKON GOD'S FAVOUR IS ON ANYONE WHO TAKES HIM SERIOUSLY, ANYONE WHO WORSHIPS IN THE TEMPLE REGULARLY, AND REALLY TRIES TO KEEP ALL THE LAW, BUT MORE THAN THAT ANYONE WHO CARES FOR GOD'S PEOPLE, AND MAKES SURE THEY ARE TREATED RIGHT. LIKE DAVID, I SUPPOSE, MADE A FEW MISTAKES, BUT GOD REALLY LOVED HIM – YOU COULD SEE IT . NOW, OF COURSE THERE'S JESUS, I CAN WORSHIP HIM ANY TIME, ANYWHERE. YES, THAT NIGHT REALLY CHANGED THINGS FOR US SHEPHERDS, AND FOR EVERYONE ELSE TOO I SUPPOSE.

I WILL CLOSE WITH A QUOTE FROM THOMAS MERTON – “CHRIST IS BORN. HE IS BORN TO US. AND, HE IS BORN TONIGHT. FOR CHRISTMAS IS NOT MERELY A DAY LIKE EVERY DAY MADE HOLY AND SPECIAL BY A SACRED MYSTERY. IT IS NOT MERELY ANOTHER DAY IN THE WEARY

**ROUND OF TIME. TODAY, ETERNITY ENTERS INTO TIME, AND
TIME, SANCTIFIED, IS CAUGHT UP INTO ETERNITY....” AMEN**