

Christmas eve 2020 LUKE 2:1-20, 2 COR 8:9, MICAH 5:2, IS 7:14

A SIX-YEAR-OLD SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS DID A CHRISTMAS PLAY. THE TEACHER HAD THEM DO THE STAGING. THEY HAD THREE MARYS, TWO JOSEPHS, SIX SHEPHERDS, TWO WISE GUYS AND A BOY WHO WAS REALLY GOOD AT MOO-ING.

ANOTHER BOY WAS THE DOCTOR. AS THE SCENE PLAYED OUT, THE WEE LITTLE DOCTOR WENT BEHIND THE MANGER, HUSHED THE COW, PICKED UP THE DOLL, WRAPPED IT IN A BLANKET, AND, WITH A BIG SMILE ON HIS FACE, HELD THE BABY UP TO THE MARYS AND JOSEPHS AND SAID, **CONGRATULATIONS, IT'S A...GOD!**

THAT LITTLE PHYSICIAN HAD A GOOD GRASP OF THE INCARNATION. THE BIRTH OF JESUS IS A ONE TIME EVENT THAT ACTUALLY PULLED OFF WHAT SO MANY MYSTICS HAD DREAMT UP IN EGYPTIAN AND GREEK MYTHOLOGY; **GOD IS WITH US!**

LUKE WRITES THAT *MARY TREASURES THESE THINGS AND PONDERES THEM IN HER HEART*. THERE ARE THREE ARRIVALS THIS NIGHT WHICH WOULD GIVE HER YEARS OF MEDITATION. WE JOIN HER IN PONDERING AN EXTRAORDINARY EVENING.

WITH ALL THE COVID AND ELECTION FRUSTRATION SWIRLING AROUND IN OUR HEADS INSTEAD OF SUGAR PLUMS, WE NEED SOMETHING FROM GOD TO PONDER. WHAT BETTER, THAN HIS COMING FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH TO BE WITH US.

THE FIRST ARRIVAL OF CHRISTMAS IS NOT A CARD FROM ELIZABETH OR PRESENTS DELIVERED DOWN A STABLE CHIMNEY. IT'S THE END OF A HARD JOURNEY. MARY AND JOSEPH ARRIVE IN BETHLEHEM FROM NAZARETH.

LUKE MAKES SURE WE UNDERSTAND THIS IS A LITERAL HISTORICAL EVENT. HE GIVES THE DETAILS OF PLACE, ISSUES AND POLITICAL FIGURES SO WE KNOW THAT THE BIRTH OF JESUS IS A FACT, NOT ANOTHER MYTH. THIS MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE AS WE REFLECT ON WHAT THIS LITTLE BABY MEANS FOR US.

JOSEPH AND MARY CHOKE ON THE CENSUS. THEY HAVE TO TRAVEL TO BETHLEHEM! MARY IS GOING TO GIVE BIRTH ANY DAY, AND IT'S A LONG DIFFICULT JOURNEY. THEY HAVE NO CHOICE; CAESAR IS IN CONTROL.

OR IS HE? ACTUALLY, GOD IS BEHIND THE DECREE. THIS MASSIVE REGISTRATION PLAN IS SIMPLY GOD'S WAY TO GET MARY IN THE CORRECT PLACE FOR JESUS TO BE BORN. MICAH PROPHESED THE MESSIAH'S BIRTH IN BETHLEHEM.

CAESAR AUGUSTUS WANTS TO BE GOD AND YET, HE PLAYS RIGHT INTO THE HAND OF THE TRUE GOD - THE GOD WHO IS BECOMING MAN, JUST AS PLANNED. JOSEPH AND MARY ARRIVE IN BETHLEHEM, ONLY TO SEE A 'NO VACANCY' SIGN OUT FRONT OF EVERY HOTEL. SO, JESUS IS BORN...WHERE EXACTLY? LUKE DOESN'T SAY. HE FIGURES WE'LL HAVE ENOUGH TO PONDER AS THE SON OF GOD IS LAID IN A MANGER, A FEED BOX FOR COWS AND SHEEP.

WHAT AN ARRIVAL, EH? IT COULD OF WENT BETTER FOR A WEARY MARY. FIRST CHILD...GABRIEL'S MIRACLE BABY...SLEEPING IN HAY AMONG BEASTS. THIS IS PLENTY TO CHEW ON AS SHE SPREADS OUT ON HER OWN HAY TO TRY AND RECOVER FROM THE TRIP AND THE EXHAUSTING LABOR PAINS.

2 IN THE SILENCE OF A STARLIT NIGHT, MARY PONDERES A SECOND ARRIVAL – A BOYCHILD. HIS INFANT CRY IS THE VOICE OF GOD THROUGH HUMAN LIPS. THE JOURNEY FROM NAZARETH IS 80 MILES; JESUS LAID ASIDE HIS GLORY IN HEAVEN, TRAVELING THROUGH TIME AND SPACE, TO BE LAID INSIDE A FEEDING TROUGH.

PAUL WRITES: FOR YOU **KNOW** THE **GRACE** OF OUR LORD **JESUS CHRIST**, THAT THOUGH HE WAS **RICH**, YET FOR **YOUR** SAKES HE BECAME **POOR**, SO YOU, THROUGH HIS **POVERTY**, MIGHT **BECOME RICH**. PONDER THAT!

IT'S **EASY** TO LOOK AT ALL THE **DUMMIES** TRYING TO **HIDE** THE **NEWS** FROM US AND ALL THE **GRADE 4** ELECTED **OFFICIALS** WANTING TO BE **CAESAR** AND WONDER **WHY** JESUS WOULD EVEN **BOTHER** COMING. THEN, WE CONSIDER OUR **OWN** **SINFUL** **PRIDE** AND **THOUGHTLESS WAYS**, AND THIS **ARRIVAL** IS **PROFOUNDLY PERSONAL**.

**GOD** HAD IT **PLANNED** AGAIN. **JESUS** IS **BORN** IN A **STABLE** TO **OPEN** OUR **EYES** TO **REAL** LIFE – BEING A **HUMBLE** **SERVANT** **RATHER** THAN A **PROUD** **CAESAR**.

**KING HEROD** HAS A **HILL-TOP** **PALACE** JUST **OUTSIDE** **BETHLEHEM**. THE **MASSIVE** **HERODIUM** HAS 200 **POLISHED** **MARBLE** **STEPS** LEADING TO A **SERIES** OF **TOWERS** AND **ARCHES**. THE **SWIMMING** **POOL** IS **TWICE** THE **SIZE** OF AN **OLYMPIC** **POOL**. THE **PALACE** IS **VISIBLE** FROM THE **STABLE**, **BLAZING** **AWAY** WITH ITS **TORCHES**. **WHAT** MIGHT **GOD** BE **SAYING** TO US?

THE **MANGER** SHOULD BE MADE OF **GOLD**, EH? **PEOPLE** SHOULD **OPEN** THEIR **HOMES** TO **MARY** AND **JOSEPH**. **DOCTORS** AND **CHOIRS** SHOULD **COME** TO **WELCOME** THIS **ARRIVAL**. BUT **NO**...JUST **HAY**.

**YOU** WANT TO MAKE IT **EASIER** ON **JESUS**, **MARY** AND **JOSEPH**. **GOD** DOES **NOT**. HE **COULD** HAVE **LEFT** ONE **ROOM** IN THE **INN**. HE **COULD** HAVE **WORKED** SOME **WEALTHY** **PARENTS** OR A **WING** IN THE **HERODIUM**.

AND, **JESUS** **COULD** HAVE **TURNED** **HAY** INTO **EIDER** **DOWN**. HE **COULD** HAVE **TURNED** **STONE** INTO **BREAD**. HE **COULD** HAVE **CALLED** 10,000 **ANGELS** IN **GETHSEMANE**. HE **COULD** HAVE **COME** **DOWN** FROM THE **CROSS**.

**CHRIST'S** **BIRTH** TO A **POOR** **MOM** AND **DAD**, AND THE 'NO VACANCY' **SIGNS** ARE FOR **YOUR** **BENEFIT**. HE WAS **HEAVENLY** **RICH**; BUT, FOR **YOUR** **SAKE** HE BECAME **EARTHLY** **POOR**. THE **ROAD** TO **CALVARY** **BEGINS** WITH THE **WOOD** OF A **BETHLEHEM** **MANGER**; IT **ENDS** WITH THE **WOOD** OF A **ROMAN** **CROSS**.

**QUIETLY**, WITHOUT ONE **TRUMPET**, **GOD** **SLIPS** INTO THIS **WORLD** AS A **LITTLE** **BABY**. HIS **ARRIVAL** REMINDS US THAT **HE** **CAME** TO **SERVE**; NOT TO **BE** **SERVED**. **MARY** **PONDERED** THIS IN HER **HEART**. NOW IT'S **YOUR** **TURN**.

**MARY** IS **TIRED** **BEYOND** **IMAGINATION**, **FULL** OF **THOUGHTS** AND **QUESTIONS** ABOUT THIS **WHOLE** **BITTERSWEET** **MESS**. YET, SHE AND **JOSEPH** **CAN'T** **STOP** **SMILING** AS THEY TAKE **TURNS** **HOLDING** **BABY** **JESUS**. AND THEN, A **THIRD** **ARRIVAL**...A **GANG** OF **SHEPHERDS**, WHO LOOK LIKE **THUGS** IN THE **LOW** **LAMP** **LIGHT**!

THEY **COME** **NEAR** WITH **WIDE** **EYES** AND **OPEN** **MOUTHS**: **HERE** **HE** **IS**, **JUST** **LIKE** **THE** **ANGEL** **SAID**. A **BABY** IN A **MANGER**! THE **SON** OF **GOD** IN **SWADDLING** **CLOTHES**! **WHO** **WOULD'VE** **THUNK**! ...THEY **DROP** TO THEIR **KNEES**.

3 MARY'S DOUBT, ON ACCOUNT OF THE DEPLORABLE SITUATION, IS DELETED BY THESE MANGY SHEPHERDS. THEY TELL HER THE ANGEL'S NEWS OF A SAVIOR – THE CHRIST, THE LORD HIMSELF! THE CHOIR OF ANGELS SINGING *GLORY TO GOD AND PEACE TO THE WORLD* IS ALMOST VISIBLE AND AUDIBLE IN THE SHEPHERDS FACES AS THEY DESCRIBE THE STUNNING CHRISTMAS PAGEANT IN THE SKY.

MARY HAS ANOTHER ARRIVAL TO TUCK INTO HER HEART. AND, SHE CAN'T HELP LAUGHING; THE SHEPHERDS WAKE PEOPLE UP AS THEY WALK THE STREETS BACK TO THEIR SHEEP. THEY GO WASSAILING THE *GLAD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY*.

THE FIRST GOSPEL OF JESUS IS PREACHED TO THE LOWEST GROUP IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ORDER. THEY WERE CONSIDERED HOMELESS THIEVES, UNABLE TO GIVE TESTIMONY IN COURT, NOR ALLOWED IN THE TEMPLE.

YET, THEY GET A PERSONAL CONCERT FROM HEAVEN'S BEST; THEY'RE FIRST TO HEAR THE NEWS OF THE SAVIOR. THEY'RE THE FIRST VISITORS TO LOOK GOD IN THE FACE. THEY GET TO HOLD THE CHRIST IN THEIR ARMS! A SHEPHERD EMBRACES THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD.

WHAT A NIGHT! THREE MIRACLES HAVE MARY PONDERING GOD'S PLAN. SHE SHARES THOSE MIRACLES SO YOU NEVER FEEL ALONE AS YOU SLOG THROUGH THE NO VACANCIES, EXHAUSTION AND HUMBLING SURPRISES OF LIFE. HEH, YOUR SIN IS IN THE MANGER AS WELL AS ON THE CROSS. YOUR DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN HIS SWADDLING CLOTHES AS WELL AS IN A RESURRECTION.

IF OUR CHIEF NEED HAD BEEN KNOWLEDGE, GOD WOULD'VE SENT A TEACHER. IF OUR CHIEF NEED HAD BEEN WEALTH, GOD WOULD HAVE SENT A BANKER. IF OUR CHIEF NEED HAD BEEN PLEASURE, GOD WOULD HAVE SENT AN JESTER. OUR CHIEF NEED, HOWEVER, IS FORGIVENESS; SO, GOD SENT A SAVIOR.

A MISSIONARY SHARED LUKE'S CHRISTMAS AT A RUSSIAN ORPHANAGE AND THEN GAVE THE CHILDREN CRAYONS TO DRAW THE MANGER SCENE. A YOUNG CHILD NAMED MISHA DREW TWO BABIES IN THE MANGER.

A TRANSLATOR SOLVED THE MYSTERY. MISHA SAID, *WHEN MARY LAID THE BABY IN THE MANGER, JESUS ASKED ME IF I HAD A PLACE TO STAY. I TOLD HIM I HAVE NO MAMA OR PAPA. HE SAID, 'STAY WITH ME'. SO, I GOT IN THE MANGER.*

YOU BELONG THERE, TOO. GOD'S WORD INVITES YOU AND THE SACRAMENTS TUCK YOU IN. TREASURE ALL THESE THINGS AND PONDER THEM IN YOUR HEART.

HAVE A BLESSED CHRISTMAS!