

For a Time Like This©

Is. 63:7-9, Mt. 2:13-23

December 29, 2013

Rev. Sharlyn Gates

How was your Christmas? Was it merry and bright? It certainly was white ... and a bit icy as well! I know some of you were without power all this past week.

Our daughter, Annie, and her family showed up last Sunday evening to spend the night because their power had gone off. They were coming anyway on Monday for our early Christmas together, but then they went back home, staying in a hotel room on Christmas Eve so they could fulfill their commitments at their church that night.

Christmas morning they went out to their home and opened presents in a very cold house with a fire in the fireplace, the lights dark on the tree.

“It’s an adventure,” Annie told me when I tried to get them to come back to our house. They left as soon as possible for their trip to Iowa. We are praying they will have power when they return.

It was a different Christmas for many people, wasn’t it? Power outages with people being displaced in other homes and hotels in order to stay warm or have oxygen.

Two of our people were in the hospital ... not where anyone wishes to spend Christmas.

And I was in touch with the mother of the young woman who died recently, leaving 3 small children. She was in such deep grief over the loss of her daughter and the overwhelming sense of responsibility of having custody of the children – which she wants, of course.

I pray your Christmas was merry and bright. But I think if you were like many people this year – it was at least different in some ways.

And here we are, just four days after celebrating the birth of our Lord. It’s the first Sunday after Christmas, for Pete’s sake, and we have to read about this horrific event in history? Why can’t we just enjoy the stable, the shining star, the angels and the shepherds – for a few more days at least? Why jump from the happy, joyous time into this depressing story of babies being murdered?

Well, we could skip it, that's true. But if we did, we would most likely miss a very important message that points us to the reason Jesus was born in the first place.

The angel told Joseph, you shall name this child "Jesus" or "Yeshua" which means "the one who saves."

And the prophet Isaiah said, "His name shall be called Emmanuel. God is with us."

It was exactly for times like these that Jesus, Emmanuel was born.

David Lose wrote a commentary on this passage in Matthew. He said, "So while the story Matthew tells may be dark and difficult, it isn't even a little bit far-fetched. Which of course, is why he tells it.

To let us know that in Jesus, Emmanuel, God did indeed draw near to us, took on our lot and our life, and experienced and endured all that we did – disappointment, fear, violence, even death. All so that we would know that we are not alone – that we do not suffer alone, fear alone, live and die alone. If anything, this is Matthew's version of the Incarnation, part 2." (The incarnation means that God was in Jesus).¹

The blessing of Christmas is that God is with us – in all the joyful, wonderful moments – the celebrations, the fun, the love, the family, the laughter – all the good times.

But we all know that life isn't all about good times. Sometimes it's difficult times – when we aren't sure how we're going to get through, when we are in deep sorrow, when we are afraid and feeling alone.

The blessing of Christmas is that God is with us, that God has come to us and that in Jesus, he experienced what it means to have to run for your life, to have to depend on someone to protect you, to be a refugee, to be looked down on, to love, to laugh ---- to be human.

God, in Jesus, knows our human state in a very personal way. And God, in the Holy Spirit, remains with us through all our days.

So, we wonder why Herod was so cruel; why he was so afraid. King Herod was known to be incredibly mean. Bible Scholar and commentator, William Barclay says that Herod was a master in the art of

¹David Lose, www.workingpreacher.org, Matthews's Version of the Incarnation, Part 2

assassination. As soon as he took office, he started killing off the Sanhedrin – those who made up the Supreme Court of the Jews.

He had 300 court officers killed, he murdered his wife and her mother and his oldest son, and two other sons, and as he was dying he arranged for the slaughter of other important men in Jerusalem.

With that in mind, it is no surprise that he would not accept the news of a newborn king in a kind and gracious way. Obviously, Herod loved the power he held and there was no room for any king but himself.

No room. Seems we've heard that before, haven't we? We are told in Luke that Jesus was born in a stable because there was no room in the Inn.

And Herod certainly had no room for him – a king who would upset the order of everything – one who would bring the peace and justice, and equity of God's kingdom. Surely any earthly king who enjoyed his own power and privilege before anything else would be terrified.

Of course, Herod wasn't the only one who had no room for Jesus. Many of the temple leaders were kind of in the same place as Herod. They too had power and privilege and they did not appreciate Jesus and the message he brought that turned things upside down, that upset the order of things. They had no room.

Think of it – God comes to earth as a tiny baby named Jesus – to save the people who had lost their way from the God who created and loved them. God comes in the baby with two names – Jesus and Emmanuel.

God comes to reconcile the people to himself so they would know God's love and grace and mercy, God's forgiveness of sins and transforming power in their lives.

Think of it – God comes, and yet in so many ways – there was no room for him.

Yet, he did come on that night so many years ago. And the fact is, he comes still today to all who do have room in their hearts and their lives. He comes to give comfort and joy; he comes to give blessings and hope and a peace that can truly exist even when the worst has happened.

He comes to you now to assure you that whatever you may be struggling with; whatever you are afraid of; whatever it is that you think can never turn around or be redeemed or forgiven –

Emmanuel comes for a time like this. For there is nothing that can ever separate you from his love. He comes to tell you that. John says in his first chapter that “the Word (meaning Jesus) became flesh (became a human) and lived among us.”

And he did it for times like these – for our good times and our hard times. He came and he comes and he will come again.

May you know his love and mercy anew because of the blessed remembrance of the birth of Christ – regardless of what your Christmas was like this year.

Amen.

© Copyright 2013. All Rights Reserved.