

Rev. Lynne Ogren  
December 24, 2020

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
Christmas Eve      Luke 1:1-20

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

What a year this has been! Nine months ago, our congregation closed its doors to public gatherings. Thankfully, we have been able to make adjustments so that those who can are able to gather for worship and small groups. But there are many of you who have not set foot in this building for those nine long months.

Christmas Eve is the service that often brings people together. This is the day each year that we take a break from our everyday lives to gather with others and hear again the Christmas story and sing the same Christmas carols. There is comfort in the familiar, even if it only comes around once a year.

This year our Christmas worship is different. We are not all in the sanctuary together. And many of us may not be with the people we usually spend holidays with.

What is familiar is the story we just heard—the story of Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem, the baby laid in a manger because there was no room in the inn, the angels appearing to the shepherds who came from the fields to kneel before the newborn king. This is the story that grounds us.

In the first testament, the story of Israel's exodus out of slavery in Egypt, being guided by God through the wilderness, and entering the promised land was the story that grounded them as a people.

We do this with our families and friends, too. We have defining stories—sometimes funny, sometimes poignant—that cement our relationships with one another. As Christian people, it is this story that sets the stage for our relationship with God.

We tell again how God entered our human story as an ordinary baby to ordinary parents, visited by ordinary shepherds. And in the midst of the ordinary, the heavens were opened and the angels proclaimed the good news of our Savior's birth.

It is in times like this, when things have been far from ordinary, that this story may hold something new for us. Any passage of scripture comes to us in new ways each time we encounter God's word, because we are not who we were the last time we read it. How is this familiar story different for you this year?

In the first part of the story, Mary and Joseph travel because of the direction of the Roman census. Did this year provide you with opportunities to travel? Some people have been able to be with family and friends, and even strangers, around the world through the gift of technology.

Some have found the directives of the government imposing and inconvenient this year. Did you participate in our U.S. census? What might it have meant for you if you had had to travel to your birth town for that census?

The angels broke into the quiet lives of the shepherds to bring them good news of great joy! What good news do you have to tell this year? How have you been surprised by an interruption that turned your life in a new direction?

The shepherds were moved by the angels' announcement to go and see this thing that had taken place. How have you been moved to seek out something new?

Mary treasured all that happened and pondered it in her heart. It is hard to step out of the commotion of life, away from our disappointments, frustrations, or feelings of discontent, and ponder what all this might mean. What have you learned about yourself this year? How has God entered into your world in unexpected ways?

This year, our familiar story comes with more questions than answers—except one. Jesus Christ is the answer to the question of where God is in all of what we have been through and will continue to navigate. The story of the birth of a baby in a small town so many centuries ago is the foundation of our faith in our God who is with us.

This story takes on new meaning in times such as this when we need to place our hope in One whose birth fulfills the promises of old and shines the light of God's promise to go with us into the future.

What are the stories you will tell when you look back on this year? And how will you put meaning to the challenges and the blessings you have experienced?

May the familiar words of this Christmas story serve as our comfort and our joy, trusting that Jesus is as much a part of our stories as we are of his.

Thanks be to God! Amen