

Sermon Transcript - Christmas Eve - December 24, 2021 - Rev. Bart Coleman

Grace and peace to you from God our creator from Jesus, the word made flesh and from God's spirit who gathers us, that we may worship and hear good news of great joy.

Roman emperors were fond of origin stories about themselves as a way of announcing that they were God's chosen or that they were actually a god on earth. And in ways, large and small, emperors and governors alike would play the deity card, often at the expense of people like Mary and Joseph.

Luke begins the story with the name of the emperor and the governor but quickly does a bait and switch to tell us that it is neither the governor's mansion nor the Royal Imperial palace where it's at. Luke instead takes us to a small Hamlet, barely a village. It would be a stretch to call it a town, Bethlehem, and from there he takes us out behind an inn to a stable.

Luke takes us to Bethlehem to a stable. Maybe one that looks a little like the one represented here that was built for us by Brian one of our members here at St. Matthew's. It is here that heaven and earth meet. It is here where God's bold plan to rescue humanity begins to take shape and is announced. And amazingly the people who are the first to get the good news are shepherds.

So far from the corridors of power or from places of ebullience and privilege, the Emperor is only interested in people for what he can extract from them, meagre money, cheap labor.

The backwater town of Bethlehem is crammed with people who are there at the Emperor's behest. The Emperor doesn't care about the hardship imposed upon a young couple coming a

great distance to Bethlehem. The Emperor doesn't care that the young mother is about to be.

The Emperor is indifferent that, with this young couple, there is a child to be born anytime.

Some of the travellers were lucky enough to be lodged with relatives or friends, but not so for Joseph and Mary. They couldn't even find a place for hire. One innkeeper, who was longer on generosity than resources, makes available for them a stable because there is really no other place in Bethlehem that night. The time has come for the baby to be born and the infant's first bassinet is a repurposed feed box. Imagine that he, who one day would feed multitudes and who would give himself for the sake of the world, would begin his life in a hay-lined trough.

Meanwhile the Emperor and the Governor are blissfully unaware that God has infiltrated the human race in the person of a baby. A baby whose parents are already displaced by the Emperor and who before long would actually become refugees.

Against this backdrop, God dispatches a heavenly embassy to shepherds. They are the privileged few who get to hear the good news first. and the good news is for everyone starting with these shepherds .

Today, right now in this Hamlet where David once lived and grew up, there will be a baby born who will be a saviour, a messiah, the Lord. Then a mass choir appears and they sing glory to God and they announce good news to all the world that God loves and that God favours us all.

Well, the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem because they want to see for themselves. They want to see where heaven meets Earth, where God needs us, right there in a stable, lying in a

manger.

All thoughts of sheep herding dissolved into wonder and joy as the shepherds become the first to announce to everyone that God has taken presence in a human form, right there in their little Hometown. Mary for her part treasures these things in ways that mothers often do, carefully preserving both tradition and hopes for the future. This young mother, who months before sang freedom songs in defiance of the likes of Emperor Augustus, takes the time to reflect quietly.

She ponders her son's birth knowing full well that her son is God and the love of God embodied him this person of Jesus. And that her son is destined to disrupt human schemes and in the process mend all of creation.