

Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Eve

December 24, 2006

How is it that you are here tonight? Of all the places on earth that you might be how is it that you are here? A decision you made? An accident? The plan of God? How is it that you are here to worship Jesus and not in a temple being trained in the instruction of the Buddha or in a mosque listening to the declarations of the imam? An accident of birth? A decision you or your parents or grandparents made? The plan of God?

Maybe you are one who believes that God directs everything – every drop of rain and every war – God decides who will be hungry and who will not, who will be born with cystic fibrosis and who will be born to play in the NBA.

Maybe you are one who believes that life just happens. Random – without plan or direction. One is born in a mansion and another is born to die abandoned – no purpose, no deserving – just life happening.

Maybe you are one who is unsure about these questions – you do your best and hope that will be good enough. To you it seems that life is in your hands yet you trust in God – that God is working for good.

When Luke tells us the story of Jesus birth he does not answer these questions. He could have begun by saying, “God caused Caesar Augustus to take a census so that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Luke could have told us that God wanted there to be no room in the inn so that Jesus would like the poorest children of the earth in his birth. Luke does tell us of angels coming to shepherds to tell them of the king, the Messiah, who was born. Were shepherds chosen by God because they were the lowest of the low – the most common of laborers? Were shepherds chosen because Jesus was descended of the shepherd king, David? Or were shepherds chosen so that centuries later young children in Christmas pageants might be dressed as little lambs? Luke certainly does not tell us that. No, the answers to all these questions are left to us to ponder.

In those days a decree went out from the emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. And Joseph went with Mary to the city of his ancestor – the city of David – Bethlehem. A little more than a thousand years before David had been born there – through the centuries David, in his youth a shepherd boy, was remembered

as Israel's greatest king. Now a new David would be born. For while they were in Bethlehem the time came for Mary to give birth to her firstborn son and she wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a feeding trough – a manger. There was no room for them in the inn.

Shepherds were in the fields, working through the night. Suddenly a messenger from God appeared to them and the light of God shone around them and they were terrified. But the angel said, “Do not be afraid – to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah – the Lord. A baby wrapped in bands of cloth lying in a manger.” Then the sky was filled with angels singing, “Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those he favors.”

They went to Bethlehem and saw Mary and Joseph and Jesus. And praised God for all they had heard and seen.

We never hear of these shepherds again. Luke never says another word about them. It is like they went to the Christmas Eve service and experienced the joy of candles lit and Silent Night sung. They heard the announcement of the birth of the Messiah and of peace on earth and then went back to everyday life unchanged.

I hope that does not happen to you and to me. I hope that we will become curious about this child of Mary whose birth caused the heavens to burst into song. For God sent him not only to Jewish shepherds on a Bethlehem hillside but to be friend and king and Lord for every one. God sent Jesus to be your Lord and your Savior and your hope and your dream come true. For he teaches you to live as God's child and to receive everyone you encounter as sister – brother – child of God through Jesus. He will love you and forgive you and guide you and save you today and in every tomorrow for he died and was raised for you. Whether God has planned every day and every deed of your life already I do not know but I do know God has sent Jesus that you might believe in him.

Where will that believing take you? Some of you will be taking a meal to a homeless shelter tomorrow. Faith in Jesus leads you there. Others of you will be speaking words of forgiveness – of reconciliation to family members this night – faith in Jesus leads you there. Still others will be asking God for the strength and courage to set your life

in a new direction. Faith in Jesus leads you there. Had God planned for these things all along? I do not know. But you can be sure God is planning for Jesus in your life.

Tonight. Tomorrow. Forever. Amen.