From a Manger to Feed the World – Advent 2

Isaiah 9:2-7 December 8 2024

Luke 2:1-7 Kimby Young

Luke 1 46-55

Today’s sermon title and the theme for Advent this year comes from Illustrated Ministry. And there are some devotionals and coloring pages out in the narthex that you can pick up. I had never thought about some of the obvious implications about the baby Jesus being placed in a manger. The manger is cattle trough, meant to feed the animals of the family. I had always just thought of it as a convenience of the humble circumstances of Jesus birth. Jesus family were poor peasant workers. The King of the world was born in the simplest and most humble of circumstances. Jesus was visited in those early hours by poor migrant shepherds. Luke underlines the poverty and simplicity. I had not thought about the symbolism of the manger before. What does it mean that the bread of life, the bread of heaven, the bread for the world, was placed in a feeding trough where animals come to be nourished - at the moment of birth. Even from birth Jesus was living his destiny. Jesus came to feed the hungry for bread and the hungry of heart. Jesus came to fulfill human need. Maybe even animal needs – all the needs of the world. Jesus came to fill and satisfy – even from the moment of birth.

Actually, even from before his birth. Jesus the Messiah was predicted by the prophets to bring light to the world, joy to the harvest, strength to broken and beaten and in need of God’s love. Jesus came to shine that light and share that love.

Even his own mother, Mary knew this. In her prayer before Jesus is born, the prayer from today’s scripture, Mary sings of lifting up the lowly and finding God’s favor. Mary knew Jesus would be Mighty and Holy. Jesus would stand with the poor and scatter the proud. Fill the hungry with good things and fulfill all promises. Mary knew. And Mary prayed. And Joseph and Mary raised Jesus in the righteousness and love of God. From the moment of birth, welcoming the shepherds, snuggled among the animals, bringing peace to a world of power. Calming fear and offering hope. From the manger to the cross and beyond. Jesus feeds, nurtures, nourishes and saves. To the glory of God. Jesus was born to save.

I was talking to my brother in law about this over thanksgiving and he pointed out another dimension of the manger symbolism. Mangers in that day were made of either wood or stone. If it was wooden it points straight to the cross. If it was stone, the manger points to the resurrection. From the moment of his birth, Jesus was destined to save the world.

We know Jesus from the far end of the story – after the resurrection, after the redemption, after the cross, after the body broken for all. We know Jesus word who became flesh. Bread for the world – living bread for all to receive. All of his life on earth, Jesus fed the hungry, nurtured the poor, nourished those who came seeking. All of his ministry, Jesus offered life.

Further all of his life, and beyond his life, Jesus has called us to do the same. To feed the poor. To nourish the lost. To stand with the needy. To strengthen the week. During his life and for centuries since – Jesus called us to feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Jesus calls us to care for all and to make sure everyone knows the love of God in Christ Jesus our Savior.

This season of the year, Jesus gives us concrete reminders – like the manger, like the shepherds. Jesus very first action was to welcome the poorest of the poor and to give them hope. From the manger. Jesus fed the world. And Jesus feeds the world still.

This season of the year, we must do the same. We as the hands and feet of Jesus must feed and nourish anyone who comes. I mean this with literal food for literally hungry people. Through the food pantry, thru the hope market, thru the Joy Closet and outdoor pantry. Feed people and help support ministries that feed people. But I also mean this symbolically as Luke and Mary and Jesus meant it in deeper and deeper ways. We must take care of those in need – again through Joy Closet or Operation Christmas Child, through the Gardner Children’s Christmas Project and the mitten tree. Through the salvation army kettles or the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance or any other hands on help you know about and can support. There are lots of ways to help this time of year. Likewise there are lots and lots of needs. If you don’t know where to give or how to help in other ways, I can help get you connected. Another amazing thing about this time of year is that God opens doors and directs paths. I can’t tell you how many times someone donates a gas card or a turkey just before somebody calls needing exactly that kind of help. God makes the connections. A manger for living bread. A Savior for a hungry world.

The other call to feed and nourish goes beyond the physical. For Jesus does that as well. Mary’s song talks about hope – hope that no one will go to bed hungry, hope that all might have what they need to thrive, hope that the abundance given will not be stored up but will be shared and multiplied. Jesus offers that kind of hope in our world even today – hope that there is good in the world, that good things happen, that good people do good things for others. Hope that bad fortunes can be reversed and good solutions can be found. Hope that children will know joy and grandparents will feel love. Hope that all will be safe and warm. That all will be allowed to learn and grow and meet their potential. That we can lift up those who are lost. That we can nurture health and strength and wisdom and understanding.

There is a great deal to hope for in our world today. But even more so, Jesus came to give us the power and the purpose to share that hope in the world. Jesus came as flesh and blood to meet the needs of flesh and blood. Jesus calls us to do the same – to help people in concrete caring ways, to work for a world where all will receive everything they need, by God’s grace.

There is a lot to do in the world. But children of God, here is the good news of great joy. Jesus was born and swaddled in a manger. Emmanuel has come. God is with us. With us still. Always with us. Jesus has fed us with everything we need to share God’s love in the world. There is enough and more than enough to go around. Let us share the gifts of God.

December 8 2024 – Advent 2

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;

those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.

You have multiplied exultation; you have increased its joy;

they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,

 as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden and the bar across their shoulders,

 the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

For all the boots of the tramping warriors

 and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;

authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Great will be his authority, and there shall be endless peace

for the throne of David and his kingdom.

 He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness

 from this time onward and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.

Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,

for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name;

indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God