

THE FIRST 15

Monday, December 16, 2024

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Today is Monday, December 16 and this is the third week of the Advent season. We will study the song of the Angels recorded in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke following the birth of Jesus.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and loving God, in the early morning of a dawning December day, I seek Your presence. As I journey through the season of Advent I find my heart growing in anticipation as the celebration of the birth of Your Son Jesus draws near. In this place of stillness, I quiet my mind and prepare my heart to reflect on a humble manger in Bethlehem surrounded by shepherds and angels. I listen attentively for Your message. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. Luke 2:1-5

REFLECTION

We continue our journey through the season of Advent leading up to the celebration of Christmas. We have been exploring the songs in the Bible known as the Songs of Christmas. In the Gospel of Luke, much like watching a musical, every once in a while the dialogue and action stop and following a pregnant pause, one of the characters breaks into song. Over the last weeks we have listened to Elizabeth's song, Mary's song and Zechariah's song. Next week we will look at Simeon's song and today we remember the Angel's song. The words of these songs and their placement in the Gospel tell us about who God is and how we are to live in the light of the incarnation of God in the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem to register for the Roman census. Why did God choose Joseph and Mary? Joseph is a poor, uneducated, simple man, a carpenter by trade. He was pledged to marry a young girl and found out she was already pregnant. God chose Joseph. Joseph was willing to accept God's plan for his life and he was obedient to the uncertain change in circumstances, he trusted God and was faithful. Mary was a very young girl with no particular outstanding qualities of which we are aware. Simple. Pure. Willing to accept God's plan for her life, willing to be obedient to the tasks she was given. God chose Mary.

It was crowded in Bethlehem with so many non-residents coming into town to participate in the mandatory census organized by an occupying government. Mary gives birth to Jesus in a lowly stable in a feeding trough for animals because there is no room for them at the inn. Jesus could

have been born anywhere. Why Bethlehem? It was the City of David. The fulfillment of prophecy. Bethlehem was where the Messiah would be born. Jesus could have been born anywhere. Why a stable? In a feeding trough from which animals ate.

Do you have a nativity in your home? A manger scene with Joseph, Mary, the donkey, an angel, some shepherds, three wisemen and baby Jesus in the manger? The manger is sometimes called a creche, it is the place where Jesus was laid. When I look at an empty manger, I think of the heart. How does my heart compare with this empty creche? This humble feeding trough chosen by God to receive His only Son? The place where Jesus was born.

Christ does not seek to be born in the best of hearts, the purest or most luxurious of souls. Christ seeks the heart that is humble. The heart that is lowly. Even the heart that is messy, unkept, wounded, damaged or broken. Christ seeks a heart that is open and that has room for Him. Christ seeks a heart that is willing to receive Him. This Christmas, Jesus wants to be born anew in your heart.

Ask: How can I open my heart to receive Jesus Christ this Christmas - just as I am? How can I invite Jesus in?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, during these days of the Advent season, we have been preparing our hearts, preparing a place for Jesus to enter in, preparing a place for Him to be born in us anew. Thank You for reminding us that You are not asking us to "clean ourselves up" but asking us to be humble, repentant and open. Your Holy Spirit will work in us through the power of sanctifying grace. Come, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts with Your love, joy, peace and hope this Christmas and always. Amen.