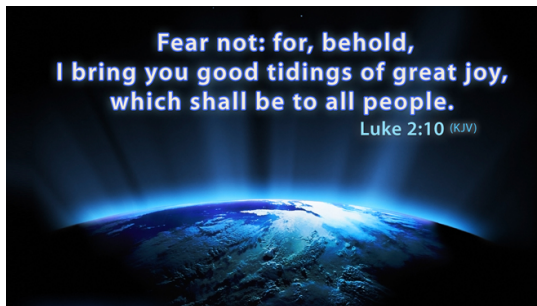


LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

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CHRISTMAS DAY

25th December 2024

(Midnight Mass)

Luke 2:1 *In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ 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. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ 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 for them in the inn.*

Luke 2:8 *In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"*

Luke puts his account of the birth of Jesus in the context of the rule of the emperor Augustus. He is the ruler of the world and the one credited with bringing peace to the empire, yet now in the humblest of circumstances a child is born whose rule will never end and whose power derives not from military might nor economic wealth. He is the true saviour whose birth is a case of joy in heaven and on earth and is first announced to the disenfranchised.

SEAN GOAN—Let the Reader Understand, Year C

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The birth stories of Jesus are found only in Matthew and Luke. Like all gospel stories, they are written retrospectively in the light of the resurrection. Again, just as in the Prologue of John, they serve to provide a Christological key to the identity of Jesus in the rest of the narrative. Finally, again as in the Prologue, they establish a significant level of continuity with the revelation to God's first chosen people.

Both Matthew and Luke write in dialogue with patterns and personalities from the Old Testament and to a high degree, the writing is determined by those earlier models. While there is indeed a historical core (the Holy Family, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Herod) nevertheless these accounts are 'parabolic' in nature, rather than straight history as we would understand it today.

In the context of the culture, this is 'historical' writing, mirroring the conventions and practices of the time. In such cases the writers use the commonplace to express the significance of the person being written about. The goal is to proclaim the present, living Jesus, not merely to represent the past.

Thought for Today

The thrilling reality of the Word made flesh is both gift and call. In the words of the first letter of John, 'Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another'. (1John 4:11) We are challenged to love the God we cannot see in the neighbour we can see. There can be no separation of these two realities: to love God is to love your neighbour and to love your neighbour is to love God.

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA—www.tarsus.ie

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. A child is born and the heavens break into song. Remember the celebrations you have witnessed at the birth of a child.
2. This was no ordinary child. It is the birth of the Son of God. In order to take in the implications of that, we can do well to recall Meister Eckhart's reflection and ask ourselves how the birth of Jesus takes place in us:
What good is it to me
if the eternal birth of the divine Son
takes place unceasingly
but does not take place
within myself ?

And

what good is it to me
if Mary is full of grace
and if I am not also full of grace ?

3. Something great was happening in most inauspicious circumstances. Perhaps you can recall an important development in your life that started in a very humble way.

4. The shepherds were both frightened and thrilled. Good news can sometimes be terrifying. Pregnancy and the birth of a child can give rise to both feelings. Hopefully the joy and wonder at new life outweigh the fear and apprehension. What has been your experience?

JOHN BYRNE OSA— Intercom

Jesus - a Palestinian Jew, who was born into a homeless family in an animal shelter in a remote part of the Roman Empire - was marginalised from the very beginning. Yet he is someone who transformed history and who continues to transform our lives today. Into all the harrowing struggles of our world, then and now, God is born. This is what these Christmas days invite us to contemplate and celebrate. Christ is born again each year in our hearts, if we can make room for him there, and in our world, if we look with awareness. As we light the white candle on Christmas morning, let us remember what it represents: the peace, unity and hope for which the world desperately longs. Luke invites us to rejoice with the angels and the shepherds, joining together in praise, singing, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace, goodwill among people.'

If this story tells us one thing, it is that God's self-revelation comes in the most unexpected places and situations: in a field rather than a temple; in a feeding trough rather than a palace. Can you recall an experience of finding God in unexpected places?

The shepherds come in the name of all who are marginalised in our world, whose lives are full of struggle. We bring these people to mind tonight, in prayer before God.

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLET—Going Deeper

This well-known story is very rich so we will focus on some aspects only, staying with Mary's perspective.

To understand the significance of verse 19, it is important to note that the Greek word which we translate as 'things' can mean both words, and events.

Scripture Prayer

Lord, these days we are all very busy.

At work or in school we have to expend much effort to achieve success.

At home we are bombarded with information from television and radio.

We have time only for the sensational

and we allow the ordinary events of life to come and go: the signs of maturity in our children; the life crises of those close to us; new stirrings of resentment or of hope among ordinary people in our country.

Even in our relationship with you we concentrate on the miraculous.

Mary teaches us on the contrary to see in every event a call to grow,
a sacred word you speak to us,

to be welcomed as a treasure and pondered in our hearts,
reflected on and integrated into our consciousness.

Lord, help us to be more like Mary.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL—Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels