

The Rock: 12-24-2021

Advent: The Road to Bethlehem

Christmas Eve

First reading: Luke 2:1-7 (Advent candle lighting)

INTRODUCE THE VIDEO: This last video, we are going to hear from Luke the doctor who dug around looking for eyewitnesses to the events that happened that night in Bethlehem and beyond.

Title: The King has come

Scripture: Luke 2:1-14 (black bible Pg. 805)

Theme:

The waiting is finally over, and the first advent occurs in a most unexpected way. Yet, looking at this story, one wonders, could it actually be any other way?

Introduction:

This is so consistent with God and His dealings with humanity, that it actually only makes sense that when He decided to

break into our world, that He would do so on His terms, and in His timing.

Advent is a season of waiting, of reflection, of hope and of faith. Since Thanksgiving here at the Rock, we have been on the road to Bethlehem- looking at God's promise to His people that a king would come to save and deliver them.

We looked at four people who journeyed by faith, believing that God would fulfill His promises to them. Every time, we discovered that He did, but it was not without difficulty.

The Story:

In our world of ups and downs, of confusion and pain, and yes suffering, the people of Israel knew also, what that meant.

If they knew anything, they knew of oppression, they knew what it was like to be under the dark cloud of a foreign king who mistreated them and abused them.

It had been more than 1,000 years since God had called that little shepherd boy David, to be king over His people. A man after God's heart, a simple shepherd of sheep and far from perfect.

But he was a leader, and one who would lead God's people in a way that honored

Him and brought them peace, even if only temporarily.

It had been almost 500 years since the people of Israel had returned from the great exile in Babylon. Where again, in waiting, His people learned of His faithfulness.

All of these events are on the time line of history, of our history. These people lived at a particular time and place, and these places can be found on a map and visited.

God's faithfulness kept His people. In a weary world, unsettled and angry, fighting with itself, peace was not to be had. Not yet. But His people waited, and they prayed.

They held onto God's promise that He would send a deliverer, and they thought they knew what that would look like. Our third reading this evening from Jeremiah the prophet was clear:

-Jeremiah 23:3-6 (ESV)

"Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be

dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord." 'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: The Lord is our righteousness.'"

They had been gathered and brought back from exile. And now, they awaited their king. Another David, a warrior who would take them out from under the violent oppression of Rome and their tyrannical power and abuse.

But if we've learned anything this advent season, it is this, that God doesn't do things the way we would or the way we would expect.

Nor does God choose people that we would choose: Abraham, Ruth, Hannah, and even David. From our perspective, these folks brought nothing to the table, except faith. They believed that God would do what He promised.

So, it should be no surprise that Dr. Luke, with his analytical mind and desire to get the facts straight, began to look for eye-witnesses to these events:

-Luke 1:1-4 (ESV)

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."

He wanted more than just the typical, "Guess what I heard the other day from so and so, who heard from a friend who, heard it from a friend who heard it from another that this girl from Nazareth had a crazy story to tell.

No, it is my settled conviction, given the evidence presented by Dr. Luke, a Greek man, began his faith journey by looking for these eye witnesses, this Mary included.

It would only make sense. These things happened to real people, in history, which meant he could actually talk to her.

It really is the only way that he could have come up with such detail. Think

about it, if you wanted to write a story for people to genuinely believe, Luke blew it big time. Unless, of course, it all happened just as he recorded.

Sitting down right across the table with this now old woman, bright eyed and looking at him, she said with all confidence: I remember it like it was yesterday when the angel said to me:

-Luke 1:28-33 (ESV)

"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

It's an amazing story really. The greatest fiction written today could never hold a candle to this. A young virgin from a Podunk town up north, will be the one to give birth to the promise of God.

The road to Bethlehem now would start there. Luke continues to write as she talks.

"I remember it well. Joseph and I were deeply troubled at first when we heard the news."

-Luke 2:1-3 (ESV)

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town."

"Joseph was worried because he was from Bethlehem, and that was a 90-mile journey for him. After all, I didn't need to go with him, but at the same time, we both knew I must. It was God's promise being fulfilled through a tyrant king.":

-Micah 5:2 (ESV)

"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."

"Luke", "Yes Mother Mary." "We remembered the ancient writings and all the times God had promised His people that He would

do this thing, and we were now the ones who were on that faith walk.”

-Luke 2:4 (ESV)

“And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David...”

“It was scary. I mean wouldn’t it have been for you? But we just knew that He had taken care of us thus far, just like He did with Ruth and Hannah, oh Hannah.

How she cried for a boy and how she sang when God answered her. I knew just how she felt. We barely got there when our son decided to appear”:

-Luke 2:6-7 (ESV)

“And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”

Real people, real places, real concerns in the midst of a wearied world. Our world is restless and tired, wearied from

all the things. If we are honest with ourselves, we just want peace, don't we?

Afterall, who wouldn't? The tyrants of the world, that's who. But God promised a king to us who would judge the sin of this world, and make it right and possible for us to return to Him.

That has always been His goal, to reconcile this wearied world back to Himself. We have to do something with the baby in the manger, this Jesus, the infant King who appears bringing judgement and redemption.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his advent book: God is in the manger writes:

"What is going on here, where Mary becomes the mother of God, where God comes into the world in the lowliness of the manger? World judgement and world redemption -that is what's happening here. And it is the Christ child in the manger himself who holds world judgement and world redemption. He pushes back the high and mighty; he overturns the thrones of the powerful; he humbles the haughty; his arm exercises power over all the high and mighty; he lifts what is lowly, and makes it great and glorious in his mercy."

-God in a manger: Bonhoeffer Pg. 42

What will we do with this king in a manger? The history, the people, the promises of God and as Luke tells us, the eye witnesses.

This Christmas eve, in the middle of a wearied world, rejoice that God has fulfilled all of His promises in this child: God with us -Emmanuel.

I close with this for us all to ponder and be challenged by. King David, before he was king, was a shepherd boy who was called in from the fields to be anointed King after God's own heart.

1,000 years later shepherds once again are challenged to go in from the fields and recognize that the king had come:

-Luke 2:15-17 (ESV)

"When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child."

Eye witnesses who received their king, this baby in a manger. Will you consider Him? This Jesus who brought judgement and

yet, offers redemption to all who would
come to Him.