

The Voice of Rejection

When we think of the Christmas Story we think of the angels delivering good news of great joy. We think of the excitement and anticipation and all the good things that has happened at Christmas and all the good things that we hope will happen. We focus on the Spirit which moves people to generosity and the beauty which surrounds us the decorations and faces of the people.

But the Christmas story doesn't start there. It starts with a couple being told that have to move because that is what those in power have ordered. It involves a difficult trek to Bethlehem for Joseph and the very pregnant Mary. A journey which led to disappointment and hardship when they arrive and find there is no where for them to stay. Which is why they end up in the last place you want your child to be born. A stable. With a manger for a cradle and strips of cloth for the newborn's clothing.

Yet some of the power and meaning of the story come from those events and circumstances. For into the worst of conditions arrives the sign of God's hope. Into the chaos created by what is happening in the world comes the prince of peace.

For the birth of Jesus tells us very clearly that God knows and God understands our lives with their difficulties and trials. God does not ignore us when we are caught up in things beyond our control or facing a difficult time and dealing with rejection. Instead we are told very clearly that God joins us there to bring us what we need.

The Voice of Invitation

We tend to skip over the fear of the shepherds when the angel first appears. But the Bible tells us that the shepherds are terrified by the arrival of the angel among them and it is not simply because the divine was in their lives. They were afraid that God had seen their wrongdoing, their failures, their sins, and had sent the angel to deal with them. Which is exactly what is happening. Just not in the way the shepherds expect.

For to their surprise the angel's message isn't of condemnation and damnation but rather forgiveness and hope. God knows they are people who have failed and fallen. God knows they are in pain and hurting. And to them- to those who had been rejected and scorned, to those who had hurt others and been hurt themselves- God sends a message of forgiveness and grace.

A Saviour has been born to bring them a better life. A new world had begun. The promised Messiah has arrived on earth.

And once they get a grip on their fear the shepherds, the people who were not perfect, those who need, those who are worried and wounded by life, those who are afraid and anxious about tomorrow. Those people finally hear the good news of great joy. The love of God has arrived among them and they are able and welcome to see and be part of what God is doing.

The Voice of Awe and Wonder

The shepherds race off to see for themselves the message of the angels. And they find everything just as it had been told to them. And I think it is important to be clear about this. They see Mary, Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. They see the holy family in the last place anyone would want to be with a newborn. They see the promised child wrapped in strips of cloth lying on hay. And the Shepherds rejoice.

They give thanks to God. For they can see beyond the dirty surroundings and the difficult situation to glimpse what God is doing. They look at the tired faces of Mary and Joseph and see people blessed by God. They look at the newborn baby and see the face of God looking back at them.

And they answer. Everyone who will listen gets the story of the angels and the message about Jesus. People who had nothing in their lives, rejected and scorned now are the bearers of the greatest possible message- That God's love and grace has arrived on earth and the Saviour has been born..

The Bible tells us that everyone who hears them is amazed. And I think that is probably a polite way of saying that no one really believes them. But some heard for certain. Mary treasured those words in her heart. She thought about what had been said and considered it in the years to come.

I know this year has been hard. And I know people are still anxious and worried and afraid about what is going on around us and what is happening in our lives. So be like the shepherds and take the message with you from here that God has not forgotten us, that God is at work in our lives and in our world. Be sincere, be honest but tell what you hope and what you believe. And be like Mary and treasure the good news of Jesus Christ in your hearts this night and in the days to come.