

**“God’s Heart is here!”**  
**A Christmas Pageant**  
**Psalm 148, Luke 2: 1 – 20, Matthew 2: 1 – 2, 9 – 11**  
 West Swamp Mennonite Church # 41  
 December 25, 2016

**Luke 2: 1 – 3:                   Taxation & journey**

*“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register.”*

Under Roman rule, the census was used to assess taxes and to keep up with those males liable for compulsory military service. Jews were exempted from military service thus it was all about taxes when Mary and Joseph started out on the 80 – 100 mile trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem. There are questions about Luke’s timeline and Roman taxation policies in general but Luke, like Matthew, is interested in getting Jesus to Bethlehem, the head of the tribe of David. For Luke, “Son of David” is an important title for Jesus and he wants all to know that Joseph was from that tribe.

**Luke 2: 4 – 7:                   Holy Family – a child is born!**  
**Cow & Donkey**

*“<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.”*

Depending on the route they took, it would have taken them 8 – 10 days of hard walking to get to Bethlehem. Their nightly accommodations would normally have been primitive stall-like spaces, a guest room, or a sleeping area in a peasant's home with animals in the next room. But Luke tells us there were no rooms left for them anywhere - thus they were relegated to the space where the animals were kept.

And it is hard to imagine the scene without the smell that comes with barnyard animals. Cows, donkeys and goats - their feeding trough would become a bed for the baby.

Luke gives us few details about the birth itself— no date, no delivery details, and no innkeeper or anybody else named present that night. We just know it was Mary's firstborn and that she wrapped the child in cloth like every other Jewish baby and laid him in the manger.

### **Luke 2: 8: Shepherds & 2 sheep**

*<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night."*

In the fields on the edge of town, shepherds are guarding their sheep.

Shepherds had a bad reputation among the more religious Jews. The shepherds were looked down upon because they did not get to Temple, could not abide by the rules of the Torah or follow all those purity laws.

Hand-washing just was not their thing. They were seen as dirty, shiftless,

and dishonest – among the lowest ranks of Jewish society. It is to these men that God proclaims his message.

### **Luke 2: 9 – 13: 1 Angel joins shepherds**

<sup>9</sup> *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.* <sup>10</sup> *But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.* <sup>11</sup> *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.* <sup>12</sup> *This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

We hear the word angel and our minds go back to all those angels of the Old Testament. We recall the 3 that visited Abraham, Jacob had one appear in a dream, and Elijah was strengthened by an angel who brought him bread and water in the wilderness just to name a few. Most recently Mary was visited by an angel announcing her pregnancy. As mysterious messengers of God, angels speak a word from the Lord. Today an angel heralds the good news of the birth of Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

### **Luke 2: 13 – 15: 2 Angels join 1 Angel**

<sup>13</sup> *Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,* <sup>14</sup> *“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

Such a wonderful word from God cannot go forth without a response of worship from those who declare it. God has given the world a precious gift



<sup>20</sup> *The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

These lowly shepherds needed a word of hope and joy as much or more than anyone. Eking out a meager living, exposed to harsh weather conditions, and isolated from family and others for extended periods of time, their joy and praise was all the more ecstatic. Those around them must surely have seen and heard their message as truth.

### **Matthew 2: 1 – 2:      3 Kings enter Jerusalem**

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Wise men from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”*

From local down-and-out Jewish shepherds to the worldly and spiritually wise of the Gentile world, God has a message to spread over all the earth. These wise men were lauded for their ability to read the signs in the heavens. And in seeing a particular star rising in the early morning hours tell them that a new Jewish king has been born. Thus they pack up and travel a great distance west to Jerusalem to pay homage to this new king. Time has passed since that nighttime birth of Jesus in a manger.

### **Matthew 2: 9 – 10:      3 Kings find Jesus & Worship Him**

*<sup>9</sup> After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.*

Old King Herod must have been threatened in every bone of his body to discover from these world-wide astrologers that a new baby king has been born right under his feet. It is a blessing Herod did not decide to secretly follow them as the wise men continued on their way - following that star along the five miles that would lead them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. It must have been a shock for Mary & Joseph to find these wealthy worldly men walking into their simple home and bowing down to worship baby Jesus.

### **Matthew 2: 11                      3 Kings offer their Gifts**

*Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.*

Giving praise and adoration to the Lord is where God has always wanted us. From angels to lowly shepherds to the worldly wise. Bringing to God everything we are and everything we have. Great reverence, deep joy, loving hearts and endless hope in all that Jesus will accomplish in our world. As his witnesses, we serve and honor him with our lives and our gifts.

Every character in the Christmas story has walked the way of God's heart and found Jesus – their Savior - the very heart of God's Love. Through this Advent season we have walked our way to God's heart. And today, we too, celebrate the birth of Jesus – our Savior - the very heart of God's Love. We too are witnesses to what this Jesus has and will do in our world as we seek to follow him and the Holy Spirit. May this be the reason for our Christmas joy! And may God bless us every one