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Luke 2

Luke 2.¹⁻⁷— Meditation 1

*In those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. ²(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) ³And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) ⁵to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. ⁶While they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. ⁷And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

God found a “handmaiden” of “low estate” and lifted her up to become the mother of the Son of God, King of Israel. By so doing, God made Mary the first beneficiary of the work he intended to perform through Jesus and his ministry—the work through which he would “put down the mighty from their seats, and exalt them of low degree” and “fill the hungry with good things, and the rich he [would send] empty away.”¹

Mary’s son, Jesus, was destined to participate in both his mother’s “lowliness” and in her “exaltation.” His lowliness is seen in his infancy as he is dressed in rags and put to bed in an animal feeding trough found in an inn’s barn. He was born under the shadow of suspicion concerning his mother’s virtue and therefore his own legitimacy. Because he knew what it meant to be of “low estate,” he would feel special attachment to others so deemed. And he would know how, through God, to succor and to raise up those of “low degree.”

And whether we know it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, all of us are of “low estate” and of “low degree.” We all require the lifting up and exaltation that only he can provide. We who know and acknowledge our lowliness take comfort in the circumstances of Jesus’ birth. And we await the day when we can participate in the glory he achieved through his self-abasement.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 21, 2024)

¹ Luke 1.⁵²⁻⁵³

*In those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.
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In the first series of atonement readings, we introduced the title, “The Savior’s Unity and Connectedness with us” with the passage found at Hebrew 2.⁹⁻¹⁸. Here, the writer teaches that “as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [Jesus] also himself likewise took part of the same. Jesus, he exalts, “is not ashamed to call them brethren.”

In being wrapped in rags and laid in a feeding trough, God signals his sincere intention to form connections, to be one with even the poorest, lowliest of his “brethren.” He would not, however, do so passively. He would not express his attachment with them through soaring rhetoric. He would, instead, express his unity with them in actual deed. He would live with and as they live. He would suffer the indignity of poverty, as reflected through his infant dress and sleeping arrangement, all the while possessing infinite dignity. He would remain homeless, dependent upon the generosity of others for shelter: “But the son of man hath not where to lay his head.”¹

It is little wonder that John was surprised to have Jesus approach him for baptism. John’s ordinance was, after all, intended for sinners and the remission of their sins. What need did Jesus, the Lamb of God, have for a sinner’s ordinance? Whatever other reasons one might consider, this one must be among them: Jesus submitted himself to a sinner’s ordinance to demonstrate his intention of being part of their lives, of being united with and connected to them. They were his “brethren,” and he would attach himself to them.

I do not know where you would rank the example of divine connectedness that is reflected in the connection that Jesus made with the thieves that hung on either side of him at Calvary, but for me, it is very high up the list. Here, “he was numbered with the transgressors.”² Here, he expressed his attachment to them: “Today, shalt thou be with me in paradise.”³ I have listened in dismay as some have dismissed these comforting words through theological mind games. “No way two sinners are going to paradise to be with Jesus,” they reasoned.

Oh fools, and slow of heart. Can you not see that Luke is finishing his Gospel the way he began it? By reporting a moment of at-one-ment. A moment of connectedness. A moment of comfort to all the lowly, all the needy, all the sin-bound?

So, Luke’s notice that Jesus was found wrapped in rags and lying in a feeding trough was more than “biography.” It was revelation. It was revelation that God had condescended, lowered himself to mix and mingle with lowly humans and that he would go as low as necessary to reach the lowliest.

¹ Matthew 8.²⁰

² Isaiah 53.¹²

³ Luke 23.⁴³

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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⁸And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. ¹⁰And the angel said unto them,

“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy,
which shall be to all people.

¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour,
which is Christ the Lord.

¹²And this shall be a sign unto you;
ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes,
lying in a manger.”

¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

There is a good deal of encouragement and comfort flowing in the events that Luke recorded at the beginning of his Gospel. “Fear not,” the angel Gabriel spoke to Zacharias as he appeared to deliver the happy news that a child was on the way.¹ “Fear not,” that same angel spoke to Mary as he delivered the happy news that she would bear not only a son, but a king, a redeemer, a God.² “Fear,” promised Zacharias in the blessing of his son, John, would disappear through the deliverance of God, thus making it possible to serve God “in holiness and righteousness.”³ “Fear not” a “multitude of the heavenly host” spoke to a band of lowly shepherds as they delivered the happy news that “unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

John may have “belonged” to Zacharias and Elizabeth, and Jesus, in some sense, to Mary, but, in fact, Jesus belongs to all of us for “unto you” was he born. And in him—this man who lets us take possession of him and who takes possession of us—in him we hear the good news of the good will that God possesses for and toward us. And yes, this good news chases away all fear.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 21, 2024)

¹ Luke 1.¹³

² Luke 1.³⁰

³ Luke 1.⁷⁴⁻⁷⁵

¹⁵* As the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, “Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.”

¹⁶And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

The glad tidings of great joy that a heavenly host delivered to a band of lowly shepherds did not go unheeded. Indeed, the shepherds did not receive it with patient quietude or passivity. Rather, they leaped into action. They “came with haste” to see the announced “Saviour, which is Christ the Lord,” now but a babe. And, having seen the small bundle of glad tidings lying in a manger wrapped in rags, they went out actively and “made known abroad” what they had heard and seen.

Neither did the shepherds’ song go unheeded. While those who heard their song certainly did not comprehend the magnitude of the glad tidings, “all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them.”

Such wonderment is often the first humble step toward the comprehension and discovery of God. And with discovery comes the desire to glorify and praise God. Such praise is a sign and gift of the Spirit.¹ Indeed, “it is good to sing praises unto our God.” Praise is “pleasant.” “Praise is comely.”² Praise is pleasing to God.

We are grateful for the Christmas Season when we can double and redouble our efforts to follow in the ancient shepherds’ footsteps. A season in which we can hasten to know better the Lord. A season in which we can feel anew the wonder of his Being. A season in which we can instill a sense of wonder in others. A season in which we can speak and sing and pray our praise to God; a God who cannot be praised too much, about whom we cannot say enough.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

¹ See 2 Nephi 31.¹³

² Psalm 147.¹

²⁵And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. ²⁶And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, ²⁸then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

²⁹“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
according to thy word:
³⁰for mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
³¹which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
³²a light to lighten the Gentiles,
and the glory of thy people Israel.”

³³And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. ³⁴And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother,

“Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel;
and for a sign which shall be spoken against;
³⁵(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,)
that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

We often look for “consolation.” We look for evidence of God’s “salvation.” We look this way and that for evidence of his love and participation in our lives.” We can seem insatiable in our need for proofs. Too often, we look in all the wrong places.

The just and devout Simeon also looked for “consolation” and “salvation” and evidence of God’s love and presence. But, as he entered the temple and saw the baby Jesus in Mary’s arms, he knew his search was over. His gaze shifted from whatever jumble of inferior and often false proofs he had observed before and fixed itself upon Jesus.

Here. Here. Here was all the evidence one could ever need of God’s salvation and love and devoted presence. Here was the one evidence that could never fade or wither. The one eternal proof that no moth and no rust could corrupt and no thief break through and steal.¹⁰ Yes, “*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world.*”¹¹ Holding this one true, infallible, and inalterable proof in his arms, Simeon was satisfied. No other proofs were needed. He could now live and “depart in peace.”

We should be so consoled. We should be so satisfied. We should all feel the reality of the great Passover salute, “Dayenu”—“it is enough,” “it is sufficient.” All our needs are met in him!

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 21, 2024)

¹⁰ See Matthew 6.²⁰

¹¹ 1 John 4.⁹