

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 12/29/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

The Nativity stories as presented by Luke and Matthew tell us some pretty important information about GOD. Some things may seem like minor details. But when considered in light of the period and location of JESUS' birth, they reveal some things that are valuable for us not to forget.

In JESUS' time, shepherding was looked at as bottom-of-the-barrel employment. You did shepherding when there wasn't anything else for you to do. Sheep are not bright animals, so those who go into the business of looking after sheep don't have much else. So, those who watched over sheep were very much looked down upon. More than this, it was believed then (and even by some today) that if you were wealthy, meaning you were blessed by GOD, it was because GOD loved you. And if you didn't have a great job, well, GOD must not like you very much. Yet it was to the shepherds that GOD sent the angels so that they could witness the birth of the SAVIOR. Yes, them. The lowest of the low. GOD let them be the ones to see. More than this, the shepherds were the ones (besides the angels) to announce that CHRIST had been born. The least important in that society. They were the ones.

Then there were the magi, the wise men. We don't know how many there were except that there was more than one because of wisemen, rather than wiseman. We traditionally think of there being three because of the three gifts that they brought, but we just don't know how many there were. But they were foreigners. They weren't among the community of GOD'S chosen people. The Jews also viewed foreigners as being lesser. They even called them unclean. These people did not deserve and were not permitted to come close to GOD. But there they were. In the same house (yes, by the time they had arrived JESUS' family had moved into a house, and HE was a toddler, a child, and not an infant) they saw HIM. They got to be in HIS presence, in the presence of GOD.

And of course, there was Mary and Joseph. They were not important people. They were commoners, from a hick town. Like the shepherds, they were among the lesser. They looked down upon. They were unimportant. But GOD also chose them and worked through them to accomplish GOD's plan. The ordinary. The lesser. These are the people to whom GOD chose to come and through whom GOD chooses to work.

This is what GOD tells us in the story of JESUS' birth. That GOD didn't do it in the way the people back then would have expected. And GOD doesn't do it that way today, either. GOD chooses those who are regular ordinary people and blesses them and has them be the ones to do things that are important to GOD. People like us.

More than this, the Christmas story lets us know that GOD wants to be with us. Among us. Working with us. GOD has always had a deep desire to be in relationship with us. So much so, that GOD even became one of us. The Christmas story isn't about GOD going to people who are better or different or more important. GOD comes to all people. Even people like us. And that's why we can embrace and proclaim the blessing that is JESUS' coming because it is a story about what we receive. And what we get to share. And what the world needs to know. That GOD loves everyone and invites everyone and includes everyone. Because that's just how GOD is. Isn't it wonderful?

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey