

Nativity of the Lord

Christmas Eve

December 24, 2019



Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

The Birth of Jesus

2 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

*14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”*

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

A reflection from Elmarie Parker, mission co-worker serving in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq

Liminal Seasons

I feel a restlessness this Christmas Eve, a type of anticipation, a sense of somehow being part of a liminal time in history. I wonder if that sort of anticipatory, liminal restlessness accompanied Mary and Joseph as they awaited the birth of their child? They had each separately been assured through angelic visits that this coming child was of the Holy Spirit and would live for the salvation—the shalom, the holistic just-peace—of all God’s people. What a threshold moment for them. Standing at the beginning of a new era, at the boundary between what had been and what was yet to be.

And what of the shepherds whose story is glimpsed in this Lukan telling of Christ's gospel? Relegated to the bottom of their society and yet regaled by a heavenly host of a birth event that would shake reality to its core and result in shalom—a society embracing, holistic just-peace that allows for all people to prosper in the life abundant way intended by the Triune God. Would these shepherds had been filled with this type of anticipatory, liminal restlessness as they found themselves on the threshold of a new reality being ushered into their mean existence?

In the months preceding the season of Advent, the countries where we are privileged to serve have been journeying through a period of intense restlessness (as have many other countries around the world, and even in the United States tremendous tensions flow throughout our society). Protests by the everyday people of Lebanon and Iraq have been filled with yearning for a new reality—a new era governed by officials committed to developing a just society, where the common person's dignity is respected regardless of religious or ethnic identity, and they and their families and their communities have an equal opportunity to flourish. A new era where the influences and greed of global empires and regional powers are diminished, and instead, the voice of citizens sets the national agenda. I wonder if these countries are standing on the liminal threshold of new realities, new beginnings that resonate with the reality-shaking shalom Christ's birth set in motion for all the world, for every society, for all individuals, for all of time?

For what do you yearn this Christmas Eve as you anticipate remembering the mystery of Holy Triune God taking on flesh and blood and setting into motion shalom—a society embracing, holistic just-peace that allows for all people to prosper in the life abundant way intended by the Triune God?

Elmarie

To learn more about Elmarie's ministry, visit pcusa.org/elmarie-and-scott-parker.