

CHRISTMAS MORNING 25-12-2019 *The Reverend Lorna Green*

Isaiah 62.8-20; Titus 3.4-8a; Luke 2:1-20

We come together today to celebrate the birth of a baby. Christians all over the world celebrate this birthday; yet this baby was born over 2,000 years ago. He was born in a long-ago time, in a far-away land, into a culture, society and religion with which we are almost entirely unfamiliar.

His parents were ordinary people of the peasant class, who lived in an obscure part of the Roman Empire. They had no power or influence, so they could not object to making a long journey, even though Mary was expecting her first baby.

The first visitors to see the baby were shepherds- rough, common, probably grubby and smelly people, not the sort you'd want to disturb any new mother and baby.

We know, because we've heard the story, that this was no ordinary baby, even though he was born in such unassuming circumstances.

We know because angels are involved, messengers from God who seem to frighten witless those they visit.

The first thing angels always have to say is, 'Do not be afraid' - because the people who see them are scared stiff!

Messengers from God lit up the night sky and spoke to a bunch of shepherds on night-shift, telling them about the birth of the Saviour, who is also the Messiah or the Christ, and the Lord. One ordinary new-born with three awesome titles: Saviour, Christ, and Lord.

The angels burst into song, and what an amazing choir that must have been. (nearly as good as ours!) After the angels left and the shepherds had pulled themselves together, they decided to go into town to see for themselves.

Somehow, they found Mary, Joseph and the baby, who was lying in a feed-trough as the angel said. The shepherds told the new parents what they'd experienced and what the angels said- no wonder they were amazed.

I wonder what the shepherds thought, when they saw this ordinary-looking baby boy, wrapped up and lying in a make-shift cradle, looking like any other baby.

I wonder if they were surprised to see the Saviour, Christ the Lord, sleeping or crying or feeding and doing what every other human baby does?

What is it about this baby that makes him so special that we continue to celebrate his birth at Christmas time, and his death on Good Friday?

The fact that we also celebrate his rising from the dead on Easter Day is a big clue that he is pretty special. But that was all still in the future for Jesus; on this day, his first day as a brand-new baby, he was all potential.

The angels sang that this baby was good news, because he came to bring peace to the earth. We continue to tell the Good News of Jesus, because he still offers us a vision of peace- peace that we need, peace the whole world needs.

In Jesus we celebrate God's reaching out to all humankind, none written off, none despised, none too strange, too bad, too inhuman.

In Jesus we celebrate the meeting of earth and heaven: the divine-human encounter which gives sense and purpose to existence, the possibility of participating in the life of God and the peace of God in the world of reality.

In Jesus we identify the life of God in the man who ate bread and fish, in his homeless ministry, in the broken bread and poured out wine.

As we sing carols about the baby, the shepherds and the angels; as we picture a tiny little boy, helpless and totally dependent, let us not forget that this is Christ the Lord, the One who has come and who is to return, the One who shows us that God loves us enough to become one of us.

This old, old story is new every time we tell it, and it has never lost its relevance.

The world still yearns for peace, the poor still need help, the hungry still crave food, the outcasts still long to be included, and Jesus still offers a way to live that changes the world.

Let's remember and celebrate Jesus every day, as well as on his birthday; and let us commit to following his way of peace in every aspect of our lives.

The Lord be with you.