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Luke 2:1-20
December 24, 2018

All Is Well

Ok lets just get it out there. We Presbyterians are a strange lot. Not only is Presbyterian hard to spell, but we believe and worship differently than other churches. On one hand, we believe in the sovereignty of God. That our lives are securely in the hands of the creator of the universe. One who knows us intimately and cares for us like any loving parent. And yet on the other hand, we struggle with releasing ourselves fully into those loving hands.

Presbyterians hate being out of control. In fact, I would dare to say that we prefer our lives, like our worship, to be neat and orderly, according to our plan and our time. No messes!

Tonight we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The time when God left the heavenly realm, put on flesh, and moved into our neighborhood as the new baby next-door. And yet, Jesus' story was anything but neat and orderly. It was full of mess. It was full of strife. It was full of chaos. As Presbyterians, this story makes our spiritual skin crawl. But the truth is that as messy as it was, God was there. Emmanuel. All was well.

I want to focus tonight on the messy areas of the story. For some of us, this might make us a little uneasy. Again, because we like our Christmas Eves to invoke warm fuzzy childhood memories which are neat, orderly and stress free. But is that how the story actually goes?

The Gospel writer Luke reports that the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman World. The land of Israel was an occupied nation...again. Foreigners had come and taken over their land...again. Changed their home language...again. Created a bunch of unfair laws that hindered their ability to live freely as God's people...again. And now this Caesar Augustus was demanding that everyone return to their hometowns to be counted for a tax census so that he could raise enough money to build a strong army to protect his vast empire and continue to live in luxury.

In reality, Augustus really wanted to become a god and have people worship him.

But to be forced to travel when your wife is 9 months pregnant, 90 miles from home, by donkey, through rough countryside, just to boost some crazy dictator's ego, was ridiculous. What a mess Caesar August made for Joseph and Mary. But how ironic that no matter how hard Augustus tried to force his deity upon Israel, God would have the final laugh. Mary, a young teenage girl, who simply wanted

to be available for God's purposes in her life was carrying the God of the Universe in her womb. Despite the mess that their government created for the people. The truth of that night was...God would be in control. All would be well!

Then there is Joseph. A young man who was always concerned about doing the right thing. A upright man. A righteous man. A good man. Never in his wildest dreams would he have thought that he would be married to a woman who was carrying a child that wasn't his own. Talk about messy. Right?

And yet Joseph wanted nothing more than to be available for God's purposes in his life. Even if it meant stepping into the mess of his fiance's life and making it his own. Joseph willingly and faithfully served as the father of Mary's child though it clearly didn't make sense in anyone's eyes. Joseph had to trust God that all would be well!

Are we available to God tonight for his purposes in our world?

Then there is Mary herself. Childbearing isn't easy now let alone in an age without the comforts of modern medicine. But wrap your brain around this. Imagine being 13 or 14 years old, away from home, away from your mother or a midwife to guide you through the delivery, and a young husband who hasn't a clue what is really going on with your body. You have to do this yourself. To make matters worse, there isn't even a guest room available in town for the delivery.

You are sent to the barn, where animals deliver their babies. There you are among the cattle, the sheep, the chickens, and the goats. It couldn't get any simpler and messy than that. Certainly less than ideal. Clearly not neat nor orderly.

And yet. God was with them. All would be well!

And finally there are the shepherds in the hillside, minding their own business by night. Simple, hard working, blue collar folk who were culturally despised by most people's standards. The ones who probably don't make it temple for worship very often because their vocations required them to be on duty 24/7. The least religious of God's people. The least educated of the lot. The ones who probably wouldn't have known or were even looking for signs that the Messiah had been born.

These are the people that God chose to reveal the news that his Son had been born. Not at all who we would expect. What a mess! And yet. God was with them. All would be well!

I won't lie. This has been a difficult year in many ways. There have been several much loved people from our congregation who have died. There have been good but added ministry demands and stresses. There is the ongoing juggle of a busy home life. There has been the mixed emotions of sending yet another child off to college. And there have been other personal issues that have been challenging to deal with. No matter how hard I try to wrap up life in a nice neat

package, I just can't get it to look like it does in the Christmas advertisements on TV.

It's messy.

And yet, I know God is with me. All is well with my soul!

That is the beauty and the gift of this night. That despite the mess of our lives. Despite the brokenness of our relationships. Despite the diseases we battle. Despite the financial strain we endure. Despite the jobs that seem to elude us. Despite our government's inability to get along. Despite our world struggling to be at peace. We can know that all is well!

I don't know where each of us are coming from tonight...what chaos, strife, or mess we are dealing with when we get home. But God knows. And Jesus wants to enter into it with us and dwell with us despite it.

Because of this baby born to us today, we can have peace on earth with God, with ourselves, with each other, and with all of creation.

Because of Jesus, we can glorify God, breathe deeply and let go of our need for control.

Because of Jesus, we have a Wonderful Counselor who will guide us in all wisdom down any path in life.

Because of Jesus, we can trust that our Everlasting Father has us in the palm of his hands.

Because of Jesus, we can know that all is well.

Perhaps we just need to create some room in our hearts to receive him tonight.

So let us set aside the clutter and the mess for a moment. Let us stop trying to control the outcome of our lives and other people's lives. Let us just rest in the truth that God is good and he's got us. Let us know that all is well with our soul. Merry Christmas!

Luke 2:1-20 New International Version (NIV)

The Birth of Jesus

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

4 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. **5** He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, **7** 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.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. (Do we have any shepherds in the house?) **9** An angel of the Lord appeared to 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. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. **11** Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. **12** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (Do we have any angels in the house?)

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. **17** When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, **18** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. **20** The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.