**THE BIRTH OF THE KING—REAL HOPE IN A HOPELESS WORLD, JN. 1:1-14, LK. 1:26-38, PS. 62: 5, 6, DEC. 3/23.**

 **The Old Testament is filled with references to & reminders that the Messiah is coming**. People walking in darkness have seen **a great light**. **He will be called Mighty God,** Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counsellor, He will be born of a virgin in Bethlehem, the government will be upon His shoulders, He will be called Emmanuel—God with us. He will be the Son of Righteousness. He will die by crucifixion & will bear the sins of many.

Malachi, the last OT prophet, spoke God’s word clearly. “Return to me & I will return to you.” **People were expecting Messiah would come**. But for 400 years God was silent, though for the Jews it was a time of social & political upheaval. The heroic acts of the Maccabeans dominate this time of Jewish history. Hanukah comes from that. The Qumran community copied the books of Is., the Psalms, Deut. & other sacred writings. These “Dead Sea Scrolls” were discovered in 1947. The books of the Apocrypha, accepted as Holy Scripture by the RC & Eastern churches were written at this time, as was the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT.

**The world was awaiting the Messiah.** The woman at the well in Jn. 4 who met Jesus as He talked to her about living water, is just 1 example of that: “I know that Messiah is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us.” The prophets’ promises of a new Servant-King & the Kingdom of God were now coming to pass! **God, as always, was on the move**!

**John intentionally retraces the 1st words of Genesis…“In the beginning”. But,**

**in the beginning was “the Word**” & “**the Word was with God & the Word was God…Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made**. **In Him was life, & that life was the light of all mankind**. **The light shines in the darkness**, & the darkness has not understood it.” The “Light of the World” was coming into the world & “though the world was made through Him, it did not recognize Him. Ironically, though He came 1st for His people Israel, they did not receive Him. “Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God…born of God… The Word became flesh & made His dwelling among us.”

Oscar Peterson, in *The Message* says “**God moved into the neighbourhood**.” Wow! What a thought! Messiah—“*Christos”*, or “Christ” in Greek—**God is on our street**! Unlike Elvis, who famously “has left the building”, God has not; Emmanuel—**God with us**! “We have seen His glory, the glory of the One & Only Son, who came from the Father, **full of grace & truth**.

The Law came through Moses; **grace & truth came through Jesus Christ**. **John & Luke focus on God’s glory—fulfilled in Jesus**. Luke says of the birth: “The glory of the Lord shone about them & they were terrified.” Being in the presence & holiness of God is overwhelming. The shepherds quaked. **Yet here was Jesus, God, the fulfillment of the Scriptures, the very purpose of God’s Word**, born in the usual human way of Mary, though not in at all usual circumstances—born of the Holy Spirit—yet born as 1 of us: Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us.

**The God over all—light, life, creation, wisdom, world events, thought, you name it—came** **to be with us**, to move into the neighbourhood with us, to be 1 of us, to show us the way so we would not lose our way, to show us the truth so that we would not accept the lies that surround us, to show us life, real life, so that we would not settle for less. **But more**, He would carry us on His back, taking us the whole way, right into the Kingdom of His Father **in a way that we could never do for ourselves**. Here He was born in an inconspicuous stable in a remote rural town—**all according to Scripture**, as the prophet Micah foretold. Caesar Augustus, played right into God’s hand without even knowing it, ordering a census requiring everyone in Judea to return to their tribal town. Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem because he was of the line of David.

**Mary wrestled** with the weightiness of what the angel Gabriel told her. How could she carry a baby when she’d never been intimate with a man? Not just any baby, but the Son of God? Who was she that this should happen to her? He’d be named Jesus, because He’d save His people from their sins. His name means, “The Lord saves.” The years of sacrificing lambs to atone for our sins, that had to be repeated year after year because they could never take away our sins, would end. **The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world was here!**

**And think about Joseph.** If the 1 you were engaged to told you this story, how would you react? We at least have this event recorded to look back on. Joseph didn’t—just the prophecies:” He’ll be born of a virgin”, “His name will be Emmanuel—God with us”, “He’ll be born in Bethlehem”, “He’ll be of the house & line of David”, “His kingdom will never end”.

**He came as a helpless babe. The world looked on both in wonder & disinterest**. The shepherds seeing the angels, along with the glory of God must have been blown away. The magi knew from the alignment of the stars that a great king would be born in Bethlehem. The shepherds & magi marvelled & told their world, yet Jesus seems to’ve been forgotten. No one seemed ready for Him when His ministry began or remembered His miraculous beginning.

But Herod was disturbed. There was a challenge, so he thought, to his kingship. **Herod represents what’s wrong with the world.** How will this affect me? It’s all about me. And since it’s all about me, what need do I have for Jesus, for a saviour. I can look after myself. I don’t need any “Saviour” cramping my style, or anyone telling me what to do or believe. So many people are down that road. Self-righteous & indignant. They’re missing the most important thing. Jesus came to free us from our bondage to sin. Free us so that we might have hope & joy.

Nevertheless, here was Jesus, the fulfillment of the Scriptures. God’s assessment of it? “**Don’t be afraid”—God tells us that so many times when He draws close to us—it’s that being in the presence of God’s holiness factor again**. “Don’t be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy for all the people.” This is good news. No, it’s the best news & it should give you great hope & joy! **Do you have great hope & joy in your heart today**? Whatever trouble you’re experiencing, you can have hope & joy, because our Father has sent Jesus. **The Saviour of the world has been born for you!** John says if you’ve received Him, if you’ve believed in His Name, He gives you the right to become God’s child! **Have you received Him? Have you taken Him into your heart** & said, “Lord Jesus, I’m totally, unreservedly yours! Have your way with me!” **Oh, the wonder of God, moving into our neighbourhood to be with us, full of grace & truth!**

 **Yet, how would you describe the world today?** Not many would disagree that it’s a mess. There are wars & conflicts everywhere. The superpowers flex their muscles & arm themselves to the teeth, prepared to obliterate any nation that doesn’t comply with the way they see the world. **C**ommunists pitted against democracies. A resurgence in the ultra-right: white supremacy that people thought was finished with WWll. The fight for power & control among nations is endless. Even within countries there are factions that want to break off & go their own way—Canada faces that in both Quebec & now the west.

 **Aside from politics**, **poverty** continues to claim millions of lives every year. Children starve to death or die prematurely because of poverty-related situations: sickness from lack of hygiene or health facilities or clean water.

 W**e’ve abused our world so much by greed** that **our climate is in crisis**, resulting in

melting ice caps, flooding, drought, forest fires that burn out of control, an increase in catastrophic weather.

 People continue to put their **trust in technology**. We put so much emphasis on figuring our own way out of troubles. No doubt, remarkable progress has been made in medicine & agriculture—food production, energy supply & creation of wealth, but that’s what **makes us susceptible to thinking we’re the solution**. **People believe we’re evolving to be better**. But you only have to look at crime & gang issues to see that’s not true. Countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa & Asia are often controlled by gangs. People pay thugs to be kept safe.

 And I **haven’t even started to talk about our personal struggles**. People who cannot manage their lives, who are victims of domestic violence or depression or the like.

 Enough! **There is an answer, but the answer does not lie within us**. It never has. We’re sinful, wrong in our nature. **Left to ourselves we’re indeed hopeless**. God describes us:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions & sins…” (Eph. 2:1). **We were not on life-support, we never were. We were dead**. We were objects of wrath to God. Ouch!

 **But God** knows our plight & hasn’t left us in our hopeless condition. **While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us** (Ro. 5:8). Christ didn’t say, “Go get your life in order, then come back & see me when you’ve got it together.” He took us just as we are. He loved us enough to take us as we are but not leave us as He found us. **Each of us is a work in progress** under God’s tutelage. So, when you see someone—Christian or otherwise--& you feel disdain for them, remember God is not finished with them yet. Nor is He finished with you or me.

 **Our suffering is not in vain**. Paul reminds us in Ro. 5:3-5 that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character, & character, hope. **And hope does not disappoint us** because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.

 In Ps. 62 **David says, “Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from Him**. He alone is my rock & my salvation; He’s my fortress, I won’t be shaken.” **Solomon** says (Pr. 23:18) “**There is surely a future hope for you, & your hope will not be cut off**.” **Jeremiah** reminds us:

“**For I know the plans I have for you**” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you & not to harm you, **plans to give you hope & a future.** Then you will call on Me & come & pray to Me & I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.”

 And **Isaiah says: “those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength**. They will soar

 on wings like eagles; they will run & not grow weary, they will walk & not be faint (40:31).”

And once more from **Jeremiah (La. 3:19-23) “I remember my affliction & my wandering, the bitterness & the gall**. I well remember them & my soul is downcast within me. **Yet this I call to mind therefore I have hope**: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

 **So beloved, we can be joyful in hope**, patient in affliction, fervent in prayer (Ro. 12:12)

**Paul says in Ro. 15: “May the God of hope fill you** with all joy & peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

You see, God has chosen to make known among us the glorious riches of His mystery, & **that mystery is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). What are you putting your hope in?** Put your hope in the living God, the Saviour of all people. It’s a hope that God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time (Tit. 1:2). In Advent, as every day, we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God & Saviour—Jesus. He will not fail you!

Share that hope, your hope, with others this week!