

“Hope Amidst the Bedlam”

December 1, 2013

Luke 1:67- 79

67 And his father Zechari'ah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; 72 to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, 74 to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life. 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, 78 through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (RSV)

Most of our knowledge of the Christmas Story comes from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Today we begin our journey to find Bethlehem in the Midst of Bedlam. ¹ Bedlam ostensibly being our world and Bethlehem the world we come to know through our belief in Christ. We are beginning the season of Advent, the season of waiting and watching for the coming of the Christ child, the Savior, the Messiah. Today happens to be the 1st of December, so we can be assured that in 24 more days Christmas will come, we will light a new candle each Sunday, we will do all the wonderfully Christmas season things, we will sing carols, eat a lot of fun foods, and revel in the goodwill to all that seems to permeate this season.

Hope amidst the bedlam of the world is what the prophetic voice of Zachariah is proclaiming in our scripture today. Hope is probably the most overlooked of the conceptualizations of Advent. We enter this season where we celebrate each Sunday with a different understanding, Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and finally on Christmas Eve, Light. Hope however as the traditional first Sunday can often be overwhelmed with the rush of preparation. We also have the distinct advantage of knowing that the hope will be fulfilled. We already know the end result so in a lot ways that dims some of the light of the Advent season's intent. We are celebrating it all but we are celebrating it as a memory not as something we are truly living and experiencing especially as we get older and more aware. Christmas begins to lose some of its innocent magic provided by the wondrous lights, and the coming of Santa and the joy of Christmas morning. We can all remember the years when we could barely contain our excitement for the 24 days leading up to Christmas it can be difficult to watch and wait.

Yet our scripture today bespeaks of a time of waiting and watching a time much longer than 24 days a time that was hundreds of years, countless generations, peaceful, warring, nomadic, kingdoms, tribes, and a time where multiple prophecies throughout the different periods were all crying for the same thing, crying for their Messiah to come. This prophecy is not terribly unique as we can turn to countless prophetic books and verses that say similar things and hope for the same result, the coming Messiah.

Yet it is in many ways unique because Zachariah's son who is almost to be born of his wife Elizabeth, who is cousin to Mary is the other person mentioned in the prophecy. The fulfillment of all the hopes of the people of Abraham, the hope of the ages is about to occur. Yet what kind of world is Christ going to be born into? What kind of world will Zachariah's son, John, help show the way to the Messiah?

Amidst the bedlam, is the world that Christ will be born in to. The world of crises, consumerism, shutdowns, surplus, cutbacks, layoffs, shortages, scarcity. The world we live in is the world Christ is born in. No the Bethlehem of Christ's time is not something we in our world today can truly comprehend but the watching and waiting of the people is something we can very much live in and with today.

¹ "Finding Bethlehem in the Midst of Bedlam", James W. Moore, 2013.

There was a distinct something missing, something was wanted and Hope kept us sustained that what was missing could and would be found. That is what sets Hope apart, it is not just the understanding that something could happen, but it is rather the understanding that something will happen it just has not yet.

So here we are on our first Sunday of Advent. Hopeful for what is yet to come and even though we know the message, and we can recite the story, we are also just as excited as Zachariah because it is almost here, our hope is almost fulfilled, the lack of light in the world will soon change as we prepare the way of the Lord.