

A Picture of Peace

**The Christmas Eve homily by Rev. Dr. Gregory Young
Presented on Friday, December 24, 2010**

Prayer:

Please pray with me. Gracious God, this night burns brightly with the light of your love.

And each time that we come to this night we are reminded of how great your love is. As your word gathers us to worship and praise you, may your word come to take root and grow within our lives, within our hearts. Make us into better people this night as we worship the birth of your son and the birth of our salvation for it's in his name that I pray. Amen.

Sermon:

What a picture of peace we are given in the Gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus. It does not come, however, from the reality of Jesus' birth. He was born in a stable, a barn for animals; a public livery where beasts of burden were housed, fed and cared for. It was dirty, smelly and probably crowded with animals that night since Bethlehem was already filled with those preparing for the census. Certainly Joseph cleared out a spot in the stable and did his best to provide a clean, dry place to for Mary to deliver her first born son, the savior of the world. Joseph gathered some fresh, dry straw to scatter on the floor and to serve as Mary's birthing bed. He found a feeding trough used to feed the donkeys and he prepared it to serve as Jesus' crib. Joseph did the best he could with what was available.

In addition to the lack of sanitary conditions, Joseph and Mary did not have a doctor or even a mid-wife present to help with the birth. It was up to the two of them and they were newlyweds. You and I can only imagine the thoughts of anxiety and fear that must have run through their minds that

night. But they did the best that they could with the resources they had at hand and the knowledge that their families had passed on to them. Not only was Jesus born in a dirty, smelly stable, under frightening conditions, the witnesses that came to see the baby Jesus were odd characters as well. The shepherds were the first to visit. They came directly from the hillsides where they were caring for the sheep in their charge. They did not stop at home for a quick bath to freshen-up and wash off the odor from the sheep or the smoky smell of their cooking fire. They came directly from their work to worship and adore this one whom the angels said was the Savior. The shepherds were laborers and for the most part the good people of Bethlehem or any town or village appreciated their work while tolerating their looks and behavior. The first ones to come to see the Savior of the world were the shepherds. And it was kind of like a setting from an old Western where the hands who've been traveling with the cattle for hundreds of miles come into town for a little rest and a little break and a little fun. The shepherds came into Bethlehem to pay homage to Jesus, the savior.

The next ones to visit were the wise men, these strange visitors from the East who studied the stars for important messages from above. What an odd group of travelers coming from far away to pay homage to one they believed to be a king. Little did they know that the one they had come to worship was not just any king, but the king of all creation, the king of the cosmos, and the king of the very stars they had studied to learn of his birth. The second group to visit with Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus were the wise men from the East bearing gifts that told the story of how Jesus' life would unfold and end.

Why is it that this harsh, primitive setting for the birth of Jesus has been softened and romanticized to become a splendid picture of peace for us? Why have artists and song writers painted for us with their brushes, music, and words a picture of peace? Perhaps it is because from the very

beginning Christians, the followers of Jesus, have always celebrated the nativity of Jesus in light of his deeds and his teachings and with the knowledge of his death and resurrection. Put simply, to understand the significance of Jesus' birth one must first understand the meaning of his life.

At Christmas we come to see the one who was born in Bethlehem so long ago for the purpose of saving humanity from the power of sin, and as the one who, ultimately, brings the peace of God. This evening we proclaim with the church of the ages that this night in the City of David is born to us and the whole world a savior, Christ the Lord; as Isaiah reminds us, the Prince of Peace; glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace to all.

Amen.