Series: Hope Is On The Way

Message: 05 Hope Has Arrived Luke 2\_1-20

Text: Luke 2:1-20

Theme:

Date: December 24, 2016

Location: Christ Community EFC

**If you would, please turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 2, Luke chapter 2 and we will be reading the first 20 verses.**

The Christmas story: Luke 2:1-20

**1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town.**

**4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.**

**6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.**

**8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.**

**10 And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”**

**13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”**

**15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”**

**16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.**

**19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them**.

**“I bring you good news of a great joy….for unto you a child is born this day in the city of David, and you will find him wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.”**

This is good news.

This is good news to us because we know who that child is – we know the man he will grow up to be.

We know of his ministry and his teachings.

We know about the healings and the miracles he will perform.

We know that he will bring down the mighty and vindicate the lowly.

We know that he will suffer and die at the hands of those who fear him.

And we know God will raise him up out of his tomb and he will forever be a presence right by our side - guiding, comforting, strengthening and redeeming.

We hear the words “**and unto you a child is born**” and we see Jesus.

Emmanuel. God with us.

And hopefully, we feel the great love that he has for us, and the great love that we have for him.

But to those shepherds standing out in that frozen field on a cold winter’s night some 2,000 years ago, this GOOD NEWS brought to them by a heavenly messenger must have been puzzling.

Why would the birth of a child in a faraway town have any bearing on what happened in their lives?

How could a baby save the world?

They had heard the stories of the great Messiah who was expected to come and vanquish those in power and set the oppressed free, but these were only stories.

These were tales that they told each other every night around the dying embers of the encampment fire.

These were stories that were intended to give them hope, to give them a reason to get up in the morning, to inspire them to go out and stand in that field day after day after day, doing a job that only the lowest of the low were expected to do, scratching out a living that left their stomachs rumbling on more nights than they cared to admit.

They did not want to believe that God had forsaken them.

They didn’t want to believe that it was up to them to lift the weight of poverty and oppression off their shoulders.

They knew they were not strong enough to do it all on their own.

The stories the shepherds told of the coming Messiah kept their hope alive.

The hope that someone greater than they would lift them up and set them free.

A Messiah is just what they needed – but they needed a full grown Messiah – a King, a warrior, a conqueror – someone who had the power to step up and make their lives better, right here, right now.

What were they to do with a baby?

Even if that baby was the Messiah, few of them could expect to still be living by the time this child grew to assume power.

And if that baby was the Messiah, why tell the world about it now?

You may as well paint a target on the child’s back – every King and political leader in the region would want him dead, and what could his parents possibly do to protect him?

A baby is small, and vulnerable and weak.

The very things a Messiah is NOT supposed to be.

The very things a GOD is not supposed to be.

Which is why even in our time, so many question why we Christians believe this fanciful tale of a God who chooses to come into the world not in a blaze of glory, not through an awesome display of power and strength, but chooses instead to slip into the world in the quiet of a winter’s night, in the form of a crying infant, something so small, so vulnerable, and so weak.

What an improbable, implausible tale. Who would be crazy enough to believe it?

But we have to ask, what are we missing if we don’t believe it?

Sally had grown up in a Christian home. She had been active in her youth group. In her freshmen year of college she took an introductory religion class.

When it came time to discuss Christianity and the incarnation of Jesus [Christ coming in flesh] one of the students raised his hand and asked how anyone possessing even average intelligence and a rational mind would believe such a fantastical story.

Why would an all-powerful and infinite God diminish itself by becoming a powerless and finite human being?

Why would an all-knowing God have a need to become human to learn what it is like to BE human when God already possesses this knowledge?

And realistically, how could a being as large as God is said to be, contain itself inside the body of one tiny human being?

Sally, raised her hand and respectfully said: “Because an all-powerful God has the power and the ability to do anything that God wants to do.”

Even if it means becoming small enough to fit inside the body of a squirming infant.

Perhaps God did not need to become one of us to know what it’s like to be one of us - to know what it’s like to feel pain, to feel joy, to feel hopelessness and despair.

Perhaps God didn’t need to incarnate in the body of Jesus to know what it is like to suffer and die.

But perhaps God understood that WE needed to know that God felt and identifies with our pain.

Not as some distant deity, but as a God who is close enough for us to reach out and touch and who has reached out and touched us.

And the best way that God knew how to help us feel that closeness was to become one of us.

To know what it feels like to be born kicking and screaming into this world, to feel the chill of the cold night air and the warmth of a mother’s arms against newly bared skin, to look up through clouded eyes and see the faces of joyful parents and curious strangers, to be held in the supportive embrace of a loving community.

What a fantastic way to build a bridge between an infinite God and a finite human being.

God steps into our world, and in the process God allows us to step into God’s world.

As the infant Jesus, God depended upon us for food and shelter and even life.

And in return, God gave up power and control so that we would know that God understands what it is like to feel helpless and weak.

What an amazing and unexpected thing for God to do.

And what an improbable, implausible tale God has given us to tell.

Who would be crazy enough to believe it?

Despite their fear and misgivings, those shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night were crazy enough to believe it.

They went to Bethlehem, they saw the child; they believed the angel who told them the good news - that this baby was the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

And when they returned to their homes they told everyone within earshot that the wait was over, that the hope has arrived!

Hope and light of God had been born into the world that night.

And 2,000 years later, we’re still telling this story, we’re still holding on to that hope, we’re still celebrating and sharing this good news.

What is the good news you are waiting to hear on this Christmas Eve?

Perhaps like the shepherds you are waiting for a messenger who will tell you that the tide has turned, that the day of vindication and hope has arrived, that God is still with us.

Or, perhaps you have secretly given up hope, in spite of your best efforts at trying to hide your despair with holiday busyness.

Or worse, you may reached the point of assuming that it is entirely up to you to bring the peace that your heart longs for, and God will not bother to intervene at all.

But isn’t Christmas all about God intervening in human history?

Isn’t Christmas about God telling us not to give up hope - that it’s not up to us to do this all on our own?

Isn’t Christmas about hearing and telling a story that is so implausible, it takes a leap of faith to believe it?

Once upon a time, in a faraway land, a baby is born.

A baby that in many ways is just like you and me, and in many ways is the personification of who we are meant to be.

This baby embodies the hope and potential that each new life has to offer the world.

This baby is the expression of God’s love and grace entering into the world, and it is up to us to nurture it to fruition.

This baby is God incarnate. And I can’t think of a better story to tell.

Merry Christmas to us all, and Amen.