

HOPE

Isaiah 7:13-14 13 Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Luke 1:26-38 26 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. 37 For nothing is impossible with God."

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

So, in many ways it has been a rough year in our country. We have also faced some challenges here at St. John. But, you think its been tough here? Think of Mary and her time of life.

Palestine in the year 4 B.C. was in a time of deep disappointments, disappointments which had been growing for hundreds and hundreds of years.

- People had hoped in their national fortunes, especially under David and Solomon. But the country had been in a downhill spiral since the civil war in 722 B. C.
- Some hoped in the Jewish faith, their church, their own hold on truth, the temple. But, the temple was destroyed in 587 B. C.
- Some still hoped for their future as a special people, but the Romans occupied their country with no end in sight.
- God had always promised to send the Messiah to deliver His people but where was he?
- So, people could only find hope in their own little life, and then an angel tells Mary, engaged to be married, she is having a baby.

Hope? There was no hope in life or its circumstances. The only place Mary could go for hope was . . . to God. But, this baby to be born was the promised Messiah, the hope of the nations, the one who delivers his people from trouble AND SIN, and breaks into our world with Love and Life!

How about your life? Have you heard the phrase, "My 401 K became a 40 K."? If a loved one has died, where is the love and friendship we had? If we are ill, what is the future? If we have failed and hurt ourselves and others, how can we look people in the eye?

The God who created the world and put us here has broken into our world. That baby Gabriel told Mary about is the one who gives forgiveness in the face of sin and failure, who gives life eternal destroying death, who gives love in the seemingly hopeless walk of this world.

Jesus is our hope!

PEACE

Micah 5:2-5a 2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." 3 Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. 4 He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. 5 And he will be their peace.

The front page story in the Anchorage Daily News on Tuesday told of a 17 year old girl stabbed repeatedly at Service High School by her former boy friend. If she goes home, her boy friend and his friends know where she lives. Will she be safe? If she recovers, will she be able to go to school and not fear another attack?

On Christmas the angels told of "Peace on Earth Good will toward men," and people continue to look for that peace. There are wars and conflicts in Africa, in Iraq and Afghanistan, in Israel, in Chechniya, in Korea, and around the world. There is crime and piracy, gangs and thugs.

But our enemy is not some violent attitude in criminals and war mongers. Our enemy is the voice within each of us that wants to turn away from the Lord of Creation. When we become lord of our lives, so when we reject him we reject His love and His guidance. He calls us to worship Him and love others. When we reject Him we worship ourselves and use others.

But in a little, dirty, seemingly insignificant town peace did come, just as Micah promised. That peace is Jesus who paid the price for our rebellion in His suffering and death on the cross. That peace is Jesus who offers forgiveness and renews our relationship with the Lord, God, His Father. That peace is Jesus whose love for us leads us to worship God and love others.

While the whole world goes crazy God has acted in forgiveness and love by promising and sending Jesus, 2000 years ago, and sending Jesus today. In the midst of a crazy world, His peace is real. As Micah said, He is our peace!