

Pastor's Ramblings - December 2013

“...and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2:7 NIV

It is always a challenge as to what one should write in newsletters, etc. It is easy to go on a rant about Christmas and how it has been lost to commercialism and atheists (Sarah Palin is doing that). I am happy to let her rant. Another topic could be the loss in the Philippines and other natural disasters. The international news and others are doing a good job with that, although their focus needs to be expanded a little to include other islands, smaller cities, town and villages. Another good topic would be to challenge the popular misconceptions about the Christmas story: the number of wise men, the place of Jesus' birth (manger), the date of Christmas, etc. But again there are others who want that band wagon.

What caught my thoughts as I was rereading the Christmas story is the simplicity of it. Here is a couple who are caught up in the daily demands of living. They were settled in a home in Nazareth and something happened that disrupted their lives (a census). They were forced to journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem because of a government directive. Unable to find an inn in Bethlehem Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son, in a borrowed place. Then she, a mid-wife or Joseph wrapped him, as all new borns were wrapped, tightly with strips of cloth and he was placed in a make shift-crib - a manger. There he rested on a bed straw as had maybe thousands of other babies before him. Even if he had been born in Nazareth, in their home, his mattress probably would have been made of straw. The surroundings may not have been much different than in Nazareth — he was born in the privacy of a borrowed place — not in the confines of a busy, noisy, public place.

Life was going on all around them. The shepherds were tending their flocks as they had done every night for centuries. The women would be up early kneading and baking the bread for the day. Children would be playing in the yards. Men would be going to the fields, the carpenter's shop. Joseph would seek work and housing. He will register as the census demanded. This may not have been the way he has expected married life to begin but he and Mary are living their lives daily, in the simplicity of village life with a new born son. Life goes on.

Does it really matter if we say Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays? Does it really matter if religious icons are not permitted in public places? Does it really matter if...? No. What does matter is the condition of our hearts. What does matter is how our faith is being lived out daily and how we interact with those come in contact with. What does matter is that the love of Christ flows through us and into the world. What does matter is that we are the hands and feet of Christ to a world in need of words of hope and arms of love. What does matter is that the church becomes the Church Christ intended and that we learn to get along with each other and then the world. What does matter is that we seek the best for all peoples of God's world. What does matter is that the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, people have shelter and clean water. What does matter is that Christ came to love the whole world, not just the part where everyone agrees, looks and thinks alike.

Life goes on. During it we are sometimes dealt curves. We move from one place to another, change jobs, schools. We may get sick. We lose a loved one. A typhoon, hurricane, earthquake or some other disaster impinges on our lives. A child is born. In a complex world the simplicity of life goes on. Things are not always the way we want, they way we imagined they would be or the way hoped they would. Jesus is born into a family under suspicious circumstances, his parents are uprooted from their familiar routine and forced to move to another region. He is born in a “temporary” residence and visited by shepherds who had angels visit and sing to them. He is nursed, wrapped in strips of cloth and put to bed. He sleeps, Joseph and Mary make plans for tomorrow and life continues to go on. The simplicity of story is really its complexity. Life happens.