

Christmas

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[0 : 00] And the worders made flesh and dwelt among us. Words from this morning's holy gospel in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. In the days before the first Christmas, God's people felt little hope.

For the previous 60 years they had been ruled by the Caesars of pagan Rome. Their own king, Herod the Great, was a vassal. If a conflict occurred between Rome and the Jews, Herod would do whatever was expedient to maintain his own power, not to protect his people.

Their religious leaders were corrupt, more politicians than men of God. The faithful were allowed to practice their religion, but only under the eyes and within the limits of what Roman governance allowed.

The average Jew lived with expectation God's Messiah was coming. He was their one true hope. Their angst created a lot of buzz that the prophecies would soon be fulfilled.

But when? But then the fullness of time came, and God sent forth his Son, born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the seed of Abraham, the Son of David, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, the Savior, the Messiah.

[1 : 29] He was born in the royal city, Bethlehem, but not in David's palace. No, he was born in a cave on the outskirts of the city.

He wasn't surrounded by royalty, but by sheep and oxen. After his birth, the angels proclaimed, glory be to God on high, and on earth, peace, goodwill towards men.

But only a few ruddy shepherds heard the proclamation. The rest of the world sat quiet, ignorant, unprepared.

Instead of receiving the holy child with honor, Herod sought to kill him. Saint Joseph took his immaculate wife and their divine son and fled into Egypt to escape Herod's wrath.

Upon their return, they settled in the town of Nazareth of Galilee, a town so obscure, few thought anything good could come from it. And yet years later, something good, something very good, did come from Nazareth.

[2 : 37] Jesus stood in the town synagogue and proclaimed, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind.

To set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. These were the words Isaiah prophesied the Messiah would declare.

Jesus said, Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Yes, the Messiah has come. The acceptable year of the Lord is here.

As Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, his message was not what the people expected. Instead of saying, get ready for war, he said, repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.

Instead of take up arms, he said, take up your cross and follow me. Instead of gathering soldiers, he gathered disciples.

[3 : 49] He didn't raise an army or build a political nation. He built his church and a holy nation. His primary enemy was not Caesar, Herod, or the Sanhedrin.

It was Satan. Instead of killing others in a war, he gave himself up to die upon the cross. As the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

He did not liberate God's people from Roman rule. He liberated them from a much greater and more powerful enemy, sin and death. Most of the world in that day did not see and understand this.

Many in the world still do not see and understand this today. The average Christian may feel little hope in these days of ours.

The circumstances we are facing are becoming very similar to that of the Jews prior to the birth of Jesus. Our elected leaders act more like oligarchs than public servants.

[5 : 01] The rights of Christians to practice the faith freely are of no concern to many of them. Religious leaders fail to feed their flocks as Christ has commissioned them to and allow their sheep to be devoured.

Both doers expedient to maintain their power and position over serving the needs of the people. The message of the gospel is not only dismissed, but despised by many.

Some keep looking for hope in materialism and sensuality. Others look to it in politics and science. But all of these are unable to deliver, and so many hopes are continuously shattered.

I wonder how many feel this year it isn't really Christmas because they can't get their stuff or do the things they want.

I wonder how many won't celebrate out of fear. But like the old covenant people, we the new covenant people have hope, true hope.

[6 : 10] Jesus Christ, he is our shepherd. He is our redeemer. He is our Messiah. Well, man will fail us. Jesus, our God, will not.

And just as he was born in this world in fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies, so he is coming again and will fulfill all the promises of the New Testament.

Just as he spoke the gospel to the world while on earth, so the scriptures still proclaim the gospel to all who have ears to hear. His word gives hope.

He gave us the sacraments to flood our souls and our bodies with grace. His grace gives hope. He gave us his church as a strong garrison to guard and defend us.

That garrison gives hope. Let us find refuge in the words of truth declared in Titus, chapter 2, verses 11 through 13.

[7 : 25] For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Brethren, Jesus Christ is our one true hope. May you come to know this hope in this Christmas season.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.