

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Luke 2:1-21
“What Does Not Change”

December 28, 2014
(1st Sunday After Christmas)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

LUKE 2:1-21 "WHAT DOES NOT CHANGE"

Red = Echoes Of Roman Imperial Theology

1) vv.1-7 GEOPOLITICAL EVENTS: SIGN OF BIRTH FULFILLED (See prophecy of 1:30-31).

1 **IN THOSE DAYS** a decree went out from Caesar *Augustus Augustus* (Gk. *Sebastos* = one who is to be worshiped)
 that **all the world** should be enrolled./ *Oikoumene* (Roman coins), Census//1:5, Taxes, *Enrolled* (4x)
 2 This was the first enrollment, when (?before) Quirinius was governor of Syria./ *Augustus* (44/42 B.C. - A.D. 14)
 3 And **all** went to be enrolled, each to his own city./ *Acts 5:37 for alternative response, Psalm 87:6*
 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, *Luke 1:27, 32, 69, 2:11*
 which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David./ *Fulfills Micah 5:2 (Place/Lineage)*
 5 to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. *80-85 Miles, Family Complies With Roman Law*
Uprooted, Note 6 Uses Of All (vv. 1, 3, 9, 18, 19, 20)
 6 And *while they were there*, the time came for her to be delivered. *No Late-Night Arrival, No Mean Innkeeper*
 7 And she gave birth to her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, *Strips, Lk. 2:22-24, 23:53, Wisd. Sol. 7:4*
 and laid him in a manger (i.e. feeding trough), *Odd, Lower Of 2-Level House, Isaiah 1:3 (LXX), Luke 13:15*
 because there was no room for them in the inn/guest quarters . *Gk. kataluma = Space Above Village Home, Luke 22:11*
House Filled With Higher Status Family

2) vv.8-20 SHEPHERDS' TREK AND ANGELS' CHORUS. *Source Of Much Great Art*
Angelophanies //Lk. 1:5-25, 26-38

a) v.8 Shepherds In The Field. *Dishonest/Outside Law (b. Sanhedrin 25b), Friend Of Sinners*
 8 And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, *4:18-19, Marginalized*
 keeping (the) watches over their flocks by night. *Association With David As Shepherd*
Humble Birth, Glorious Announcement!

b) vv.9-11 Angelic Message To Shepherds (Emperor Language: Birthday/Benefits).

9 And the angel of the Lord appeared to them,
 and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, *Lk. 1:78*
 and they were filled with fear. (10) And the angel said to them, *Isaiah 6:1-5 For Fear*
 "Do not be afraid, *Luke 1:13, 30, 1:32-33 (v.11)*
 for behold, I bring you *good news* of a great joy which will come to **all the people**; *//2:30-32*
 for to you is born this day in the city of David a *Savior*, Christ the *Lord*." *1:32-33, 3 Titles, Is. 9:6, Acts 2:36*
Emperor's Birthday: Below (9 B.C.)

c) v.12 Manger Sign Given By Angel. *Invitation To Action, Adventure*
 12 *And this will be a sign for you:* *Prophecy/Fulfillment*
you will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

d) vv.13-14 Angels Sing The Meaning/Future Of Salvation *Chr.33:3*

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly **host** (army), *Is. 6*
 14 praising God and saying (singing), *Angels Sing Of Present & Future*
 "Glory to God *(Benefit No. 1) //19:38*
in the highest, *Cosmic Glory & Peace From God*
and on earth *Peace = Shalom, Eirene (4 Dimensions)*
peace among men (those) with whom he is pleased." (Benefit No. 2) Zech. 1:79
(Anthropois eudokias = "men of favor"), Lk. 3:22, 12:32, Acts 10:36

c') vv.15-16 Manger Sign Confirmed By Obedient Following. *Fulfillment*

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, *Group*
 "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing which has happened (accomplished word),
 which the Lord has made known to us." *God Keeps His Word*
 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. *v.12*
The Angels Are Truth-Tellers

b') vv.17-19 Angelic Message Shared By Shepherds. *Model Evangelists*

17 And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning the child;
 18 And **all** who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. *Testimony, Worship, Contemplation*
 19 But Mary kept **all** these things (words), pondering them in her heart. *//1:66, 2:51b (Reflective Response)*
Full Significance Not Yet Clear, Mary As Thinker

a') v.20 Shepherds In The Field. *Model Worshipers*

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for **all** they had heard and seen, *Acts 4:20*
 as it had been told them. *Revelation, Spiritual Afterglow! Sinners As Evangelists!*
Most Christmas Readings Stop Wrongly At v.20, Miss Covenant Ceremony

1') v.21 JEWISH INITIATION: SIGN OF NAMING FULFILLED (See prophecy of 1:30-31).

21 **AT THE END OF EIGHT DAYS**, when he was circumcised, he was called *Jesus*, *Obedience: Gen. 17:11-12, Lev. 12:3*
 the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. *1:26-38, Inducted Into Covenant, Parent's Faith*

I. LUKE AND THE PERVASIVE ROMAN IMPERIAL THEOLOGY AND PROPAGANDA.

Prience Inscription, Augustus Caesar As World Savior, 9 B.C., Birthday Inscription: “Providence... has brought into the world Augustus and filled him with a hero’s soul for the benefit of mankind. A Savior for us and our descendants, he will make wars cease and order all things well. The epiphany of Caesar has brought to fulfillment past hopes and dreams.”

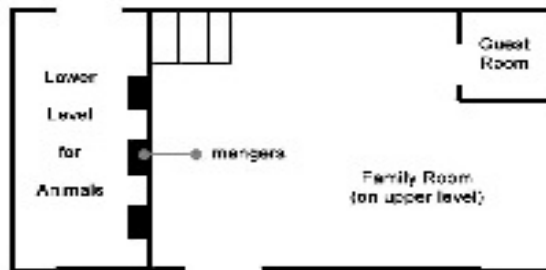
Myra Inscription: to the “divine Augustus Caesar, son of a god, imperator of land and sea, the benefactor and savior of the whole world.”

Thus, there is proclaimed on the birthday of Caesar (in these and other inscriptions) the he fulfills ancient hopes, is the focus of divine Providence, is son of God, as *Augustus* is worthy of worship, is titled *Savior*, has an epiphany or manifestation, and brings peace to all the world as the benefactor of all. His birthday (Sept. 23) was later made the beginning of the new year. Luke believes that such claims about Augustus are idolatrous, but in Jesus they are true. Each claims to bring a “gospel about the creation of a peaceful world.” Their means of doing it are not the same. One is through violence and victory, the other through justice and the inbreaking power of God’s kingdom. Jesus gave non-violent resistance. They are rival political and religious claims, then and now. Hitler is not Feuhr (leader); Jesus is!

II. LUKE AND THE REALITIES OF JEWISH VILLAGES AND CLANS.

<u>Christmas Myths</u>	<u>Luke’s Presentation From First-Century Middle Eastern Culture</u>
1. Lonely journey	Crowded roads, everyone on the move to ancestral towns for census
2. Travel by donkey	Don’t know, likely on foot
3. Late arrival in labor	“And while they were there” implies a more extended stay before labor
4. Family as strangers	Joseph’s ancestral home, many kin, “I am Joseph son of Heli, grandson of Matthat, of the family of David;” hospitality is highly valued in that culture.
5. Mean innkeeper	In house of family members, but not in guest “upper” room (<i>kataluma</i> , 22:11)
6. Joseph delivers	Village midwife delivers, as was customary in Jewish villages,
7. Rejected at birth	Welcomed at birth, rejected later at death.
8. Manger as wooden cradle	Manger as place cut out in a stone wall at feeding height for sheep, a niche.
9. Born in a cave	Lower level of village house. The guest room was normally on the roof.

Lower level = animals at night
Upper level = family space
Roof = Guest Room (*kataluma*)



Reading the text on the basis of Middle Eastern culture, the story falls into place: Joseph and Mary went to the house of relatives. When the time came for the birth, Mary delivered her firstborn and laid him in the trough. In case anyone should ask why these guests were not in the guest room, Luke says, ‘because there was no room in the guest room.’ Jesus is born, not in a palace, not in his family’s own home, not even in the guest room of his relatives’ home, but in the common room of a peasant home in a small town in an out-of-the way corner of the world. Such homes were designed so that the ground floor area just inside the door was used as a place to keep livestock at night. The people in the house lived in an adjacent single room, built a few feet higher. The people would keep it clean by sweeping everything down into the “stable,” and the animals could be easily fed by cutting niches into the edge of the platform that constituted the people’s living space. These niches were the mangers. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem weeks or days before Jesus’ birth, stayed with relatives, moved down into the stable portion of the house for the delivery, because the guest room (the “inn”) was occupied- probably by other relatives of higher social status. The angels revealed the birth to shepherds before anyone else, for the very reason that shepherds were a socially disreputable group, like those the grown-up Jesus would spend much of his time with. Joseph probably took Mary to Bethlehem not because she needed to be physically present for the census, but because she could have been harmed or killed by fellow Nazarenes incensed by her premature pregnancy (Adapted from Kenneth E. Bailey, “The Manger and the Inn: The Cultural Background of Luke 2:7,” *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 4:2:1980).

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 2:1-21

Luke's so-called *Christmas story*, when v.21 is added, stands in parallel to John the Baptist's birth in 1:57-80. Their conceptions, through different, are parallel (1:5-25// 1:26-38), as are their births and early ministries (3:1-22 // 3:23-4:15). Jesus does not just appear; his is a highly prepared arrival. The surface structure of 2:1-21 is a 9:1 concentric pattern with vv.13-14, the song of the angels, at the center (1, 2a-b-c-d-c'-b'-a', 1'). The outer components 1. (vv.1-7) // 1' (v.21) each contain a major dating, the first about geopolitical events, the second about Jesus' initiation as a Jewish male through circumcision and naming. In both cases prophecy is fulfilled: he is a son born as a Davidid in Bethlehem, and he is called Jesus, the name given to Mary by Gabriel (1:30-31). The central section (2. vv.8-20) is yet a third angelophany (1:5-25, 1:26-38), this time offering revelation to a band of local *unlikelies* (i.e. shepherds) to demonstrate, as later in the gospel, that Jesus is indeed *the friend of sinners*.

A pattern emerges. Gabriel comes and goes on divine errands; Zechariah goes on pilgrimage to the temple and back; Mary goes on a pilgrimage to the Judean hill country and back; the holy family goes on pilgrimage to Bethlehem and back, and now the shepherds go on a pilgrimage to Jesus' birthplace, then back to work. To be caught up in the work of God, travel is required! Except for trips to the Holy Land *to walk where Jesus walked*, Protestants have largely abandoned pilgrimage as a spiritual discipline, but Scripture- and particularly the birth narratives- are full of such. A pilgrimage is a break from routine that puts one in a liminal state, enabling a fresh openness to of God along the way. About every two years I need to leave the U.S. to have my soul *de-toxed* in a mission trip. I go in hope, and come back with a new set of eyes. Away from the props and securities of life, I am forced to stay alert to the approaches of God.

Luke delights to paint the story of Jesus' arrival against the backdrop of the world's pyramid of power. Caesar proposes, but God disposes. The world's true ruler is moved around on a chess board and by providence lands in David's city for his birth. The holy family are not Jewish political radicals, but quietly obedient to the inconveniences of living as an occupied people. Jesus is political in a much larger more lasting sense. He is born among family, tended by village mid-wives. Jesus sleeps in a trough on the lower level of a family house because the guest room on the roof is full of older relatives. He was not rejected but welcomed at birth. Mean inn-keepers and late night arrivals in caves are not part of the story.

Romantic notions of shepherds do not match first century reality. Think *sheep-rustlers* and *unauthorized-grazers* for an accurate picture. It was to working stiffs on the night watch that the Lord's angel appeared reflected in heaven's light. Someone later asks, "And what were you drinking that night?" The telegram from God is that the Messiah has been born close enough for them to find him if they look for the right sign, a wrapped baby in a feed trough. What is ultimately for *all people* starts with *some people*, and those are the shepherds. When the heavens open further, the sky is filled with more luminous creatures, all praising God and singing of the new union between God's glory and human welfare. It is to Jesus (3:22) and his followers (12:32) that the promises are made because it is among them and with him that the new arrangements are being practiced at ground level. The church is God's peace laboratory. When heaven is zipped back shut, the shepherds first convene for a discussion, then go to confirm the sign. Do the sheep go with them? They eventually find the home, get the names of the family, and share what happened on the hillside. Apparently, God cannot keep a secret this good! The confirmation of prophecy is a cause for joy and reflection all around, with Mary portrayed as a deep thinker. On the eighth day Jesus spills his first blood. Whatever is ahead, one thing is clear: Jesus is a Jew.

WHAT DOES NOT CHANGE

*“And they went with haste,
and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger.”*

What the angels promised was found to be true.

LUKE 2 : 1 6

In a world in love with novelty and everything new, I’m grateful some things do not change. You see, I have a problem- a big one, and as soon as I say it, you’ll recognize it in yourself. I keep forgetting what’s important, who I belong to, the things to which I’m committed. I don’t like it; it just keeps happening despite all my best resolutions to the contrary. You have the same problem as well. It’s because we share the same fallen human nature in a world that’s lost its way. Our Christian teaching of Original Sin, which is a comprehensive explanation of the human condition, says that all our amazing human capacities stamped with God’s fingerprint have been weakened and corrupted by a mysterious power called *sin* that spoils everything so no one functions as designed.¹ We are severely damaged in every capacity, and one of the symptoms is amnesia, an eraser in heart and head that makes important things disappear. For this reason I am grateful some things do not change, that I can always return to them and regain my bearings.

The marriage vows do not change, and when I review the promises *to have and to hold* I know I belong to one woman as a faithful husband. The church’s Creeds do not change, and when I join my voice with others and confess *I believe in God the Father Almighty...* something happens; I am re-grounded in a community that has confessed these words and their description of reality since near the beginning of our

¹ The UM Articles of Religion, Article VII: Original or Birth Sin, “Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually” (BOD 2012: 65)

Christian movement. My ordination and baptismal vows do not change. As an American citizen The Pledge of Allegiance is another, also the National Anthem. Standing tall, hand over heart, I watch the breeze ruffle the Stars and Stripes, then come the words *I pledge allegiance...* and the lyrics *O say can you see....* I am an American and responsible in some small way for our integrity and national welfare.

The value of such statements and practices is precisely that they are *not new*, not made-up-yesterday. They stand sturdy as invitations to remember our deeper identities. Each is a call to something larger beyond the narrow circle of the self: a call to a wife and a family, to a church and a faith, to a country with a history and a hope. I know I will soon enough forget and have to return again and again. Such is our situation; we are in it together, as our friend Paul put it succinctly, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”² We were made glorious, but now the light and the memory is much dimmed and faded. It’s not just that we do bad things- which we do, it’s that we so easily forget what’s important.

There is something else that does not change: the twenty-one verses from Luke chapter two that were just read. All across the world this past Christmas Eve, just four short days ago, in elaborate Vatican ceremonies and in cinder block churches at the ends of dirt roads in the South, in a thousand languages *The Christmas Story* was read, and it never gets old. What an amazing thing the Holy Spirit did to take Luke’s research and writing and to infuse them with such staying power.³ It will be read a year from now, and the year after that, and for who knows how long till all is called to a close. Christmas is not forever.

One day there will be a last Christmas. The coming down of King Jesus and the divine rule he shares with the Father and the Spirit will rudely interrupt all we have known and remake it from the inside out, just as happened to Jesus in his resurrection transformation. Same man, but a new body; same world without end, but in a new creation. After all, and for all our love of Christmas, the babe in the manger grew to be a man who left home to answer a call that ended on a wooden cross, then opened up into an empty tomb and a risen and reigning Lord who promises to reclaim it all. The Creed includes a prominent notice of Christmas, that Jesus was *conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary*, but it ends with the climax of *the*

² Romans 3:23.

³ Luke 1:1-4.

resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Christmas is a pointer to realities beyond itself, to a kingdom filled creation, so permeated wisdom and joy, that were we to catch anything beyond a glimpse, it would render us non-functional because our present lives would appear so puny by contrast. The whole of creation is to be scrubbed clean of sin and evil and death, reformulated and recast, and all of it- including us- put on permanent display as the glorious creatures of the Triune God. The God who once slipped down the back stairs of history and entered nearly unnoticed into our humanity is not through with us, and here in Luke’s story we find three convictions to sustain us through life and into the coming kingdom, with heaven thrown in as a pleasant stopover.⁴

The Conviction Of Divine Providence (vv.1-7)

First of all, Luke believed that the God of the Jews is history’s author and grand superintendent. This God is able to bring about divine ends in the middle of history as it is. How shall the holy family get to Bethlehem so the Messiah’s Davidic credentials are secure? And the answer is: By perfect divine timing to coordinate with a Roman census. Augustus Caesar commands a count for tax revenues; all the administrative apparatus of the empire and all its peoples are set in motion. So the holy family, Joseph- a village working guy, and his new wife Mary- an expectant mother, head ninety miles south to the ancestral town of Bethlehem. And while they are there among family, including likely others of Davidic ancestry from Nazareth, she gives birth with the help of village midwives. A first born son- Jesus to us, Joshua in Hebrew- is placed in a feeding trough on the lower level of the home where the animals slept, so full was the house with family who’d come to town.⁵ Jesus was not rejected at his birth, only later in his ministry and at his death.

How clever of our God, how subtle. To have one ruler in Rome- a pagan ignorant of the divine designs- arrange for the biblical fulfillment of another and greater ruler. Ours is not a weak but a strong God, working in ways often not seen until afterwards, and then only to the sight of faith. That is what Luke believed, what the church believes, what I believe. Convictions about divine providence give sticking power and great hope. When we cannot see God’s face or find his purpose,

⁴ See N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (SanFrancisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008).

⁵ See p. 3, “Luke And The Realities Of Jewish Villages And Clans.”

his wise hand remains at work. We know the meaning of history ahead of time. As the earth shakes, as nations tremble, put your trust in this God and learn his ways. Jesus is the world's true future, and it will all one day arrive at his feet.

The Conviction Of Divine Appointments (vv.8-20).

Luke's second deep conviction, one I take particular delight in, is that life with this God is bound to be full of two things: surprises and adventures. So it was for shepherds on the third shift that night. Their work was about staying alert through long stretches of boredom, hot and cold weather, rain and predators, no public respect since you might graze on posted land when no one's looking or rustle a stray sheep from another herd time to time to keep the numbers up. Such men are hustlers, the late night truckers of the ancient world- good ole boys. But life, even boring life, is always lived at the edge of mystery, and sometimes the other world intrudes into this one. The veil of invisibility was unzipped from the far side, and there was Gabriel- bathed in heaven's light- this time with a telegram that would forever immortalize these shepherds. "Tonight's the night," it read:

"the night everything changes. A Jewish king has arrived to impact the whole world. He is Savior of all, Messiah of the Jews, the Lord God come down. You'll be able to spot him because if there are other newborns in bands of cloth; he's the only one sleeping in a feeding trough!"

It was then that the veil was pulled further back so the shepherds saw what was always just beyond sight. All the good and holy angels singing the song of salvation, that in this child heaven and earth are forever joined so that what glorifies God is good for people and what is good for people glorifies God.

Then the revelation suddenly receded; it was gone as the veil closed. So they agreed to go and found if it was so in an adventure of divine revelation and human discovery. Working men are the first witnesses; they testify as Mary ponders the mystery of which she is a part. In a few hours several men rouse their wives with a report, "You won't believe what happened!" to which the reply is, "And how much did you drink last night?" "None at all. There was this angel and a baby in a trough and..."

I believe in divine appointments- not just because they are in Scripture, but

because they happen to me at regular intervals. You may think me naive and credulous, but so it was with the shepherds, and I much prefer their company to the cynicism that is so much a part of our world.

It was Sunday, November 20, 2011. I'd just returned from a week of mission in Honduras at 1:30 that morning. I was at the church at 6:00am, preached twice, taught Sunday School, prayed with several folk, then went to lunch with Lori. I was exhausted, running on adrenaline and caffeine. As I took the last bite of a burger the phone rang, "Pastor Phil, this is Judy, my grandmother's about to die. Can you come? It was a young woman I'd recently helped out with some food, not a member of our church, but I remembered giving her my card with a casual offer of *Call me if you need me*. Apparently she believed me.

Between her request and my answer three seconds hence, an internal debate erupted. "I'm tired. I deserve a nap. I don't even know the grandmother; where's her pastor anyway? Why isn't he taking care of his own people" Then my better nature kicked in, "I'll be there in ten minutes."

The call does not always come at a good time. For the shepherds it was the middle of the night shift, for me when I had about all of God I wanted for a day. As I walked into Carolina Pines Hospital I offered a prayer, "I'm not at my best. Help me comfort this family. Come Holy Spirit. Amen." The elevator doors opened, and out I walked onto the second floor.

There must have been ten people in the room. It was tense with anxiety. By the sound of her breathing and the fixed stare, it would not be long. Noting more for medicine to do except keep her out of distress. I greeted the granddaughter who called and surveyed the scene looking for pastoral clues as to how to proceed.

A daughter was kneeling beside the bed holding her mother's hand. "I'm Pastor Phil," I said, "from St. Luke here in Hartsville. Where's your mother from? Does her pastor know she's in the hospital?"

"It's a while since she's been to church, being sick and all. She's a member of a church near Columbia where we live now, but we used to live in Cheraw."

She now had my full attention. "That's where I'm from. My last name is Thraikill."

“Are you Dr. Jim’s son? He used to be my doctor when I was a kid, mamma’s too. He was always so good to us as a family.” I filled with emotion; I had stumbled onto a hidden treasure in the midst of a resented duty.

I then said something that registered only after I said it. It came out of my depths. Ever had such an experience? When you say more than you know? Some are Freudian and funny, others much more, and this was one of those. “He died almost two years ago,” I said, “and since he couldn’t come this afternoon, he sent me.”

I’m not quite sure what happened, except that everyone in the room was suddenly alert. I went from outside to insider; the credibility earned forty years ago was transferred to me as a gift. It took three or four deep breaths to regain composure, after which I read Psalm 130 and laid hands on this beloved woman to ask for a good death and a safe arrival within heaven’s gates. I felt the winds of the kingdom blowing across my heart; I was grateful I did not let a dose of fatigue and a whiff of self-interest rob me of this moment. I did my duty with prayer, and in that room there opened to me a glimpse of a kingdom where so much is prepared before ever we arrive on the scene. I showed up, but the credibility was not mine. It was deposited decades before by another servant who had no idea what was ahead. Yes, I do believe- as the Creed proclaims- *in the communion of the saints*. A doctor for the body, a physician for the soul, and here they came together in a kingdom moment forty years apart.

If you call it a coincidence, I will not argue, but for me it was one more example of a God who loves to inject adventure and meaning into the lives of any who dare to obey, whether they be Bethlehem shepherds or tired pastors. This is what keeps me spiritually alive, this nagging sense that every day and every person and every phone call may be a window into the other world and its vast resources.

As I left the room and walked down the hall with Lori, I paused at the nurses station. I thought I heard a voice, or was it my own thoughts? It said, “Phil, this is how to operate. The good works I call you to have been prepared. It’s not for you to *make things happen* but to obey my voice and *watch things happen*. Today you entered your earthly father’s credibility; now I will show you mine.”

I was undone for the rest of day and for several afterwards. But what joy as I entered into the fellowship of verse 20: “And the shepherds returned with Pastor Phil,

glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” I went to do my duty; I left with a word from above. We are all- I believe- to live with the shepherds and to tell stories of divine surprises and holy adventures. Our God bends and guides history toward the vindication of Jesus Christ. To all who listen and follow, he lets them in on the delights and burdens of his ongoing work in the world.

The Conviction Of Jesus’ Jewishness (v.21)

And finally a third deep conviction from Luke’s Christmas story: he asks us never to forget his people, because it is through the Jews that the holy flame of true faith has been kept lit in a dark world. The one and holy God of Israel was revealed first to Abraham and his offspring, a light to the nations and the source of the Scriptures; these are the people who gave us the Lord’s noble father, his virgin mother, and the Savior himself who- on the eighth day after birth- spilt his first blood as he entered the ancient covenant of his people in circumcision. Anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism is anti-God, and that is not so much a current political statement as an abiding moral and spiritual one. There is a reason they’ve had such a hard history; the world just not want to deal with the holy God they know and whose stories they carry in their Bible and customs wherever they are scattered.

I am thankful that artists across the ages have depicted the crucified Jesus with a loin cloth, though it was not historically so. Like thousands of others, he was crucified naked for maximum shame. But many of the artists who painted the infancy scene, or the Madonna and child, do not add a diaper. It’s so we may all see that our Savior is a circumcised Jew. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the one God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. We are saved through the witness of the Jews and by a particular Jew named Jesus. He is God the Son come among us, and he is the only way back into God’s kingdom. Some things do not change, as I learn from Luke.

- 1) God is in control of history, and will bring it to a glorious end, so get on board.
 - 2) The life of faith is full of surprises and adventures, so have a few of your own.
 - 3) We must never forget or minimize the Jewishness of Jesus, so take a
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stand against all racial and religious hatreds, but particularly against this one because they have suffered so long and given us so much.

Don't miss out on life's biggest adventure. What would it mean for you to become a serious follower of Jesus Christ? I and this church are here to help you do just that. It's why we exist, as our United Methodist mission statement makes clear, "We are to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."⁶ What if we just worked on this one thing for the next year? Wouldn't that be enough?

⁶ *BOD 2012: 91.*
