

ALL SAINTS' CATHEDRAL, KAMPALA

CANDLE LIGHT SERVICE (Sunday, 24th December 2017)

Luke 2:1-20

Theme: Good news to all the people (The Un-Told Story Of Christmas)

PRAYER: God of Love, you have brought us together tonight and blessed us with your very presence. Open our eyes to the light of Christ which glows in the darkness of a world overwhelmed with apathy, pain and loss; a world separated from you.

Speak to us now, that we may hear the good news of your salvation.

May this be a night worthy of a king, and not just a king, but the king of kings, Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

I really don't know, I wonder if other preachers find it hard to prepare a Christmas message like I do.

- Every one of us could probably tell the Christmas Story
- It is on our finger tips
- We know it very well.
 - o A young virgin named Mary conceives a child by the Holy Spirit.
 - o She and her betrothed, Joseph, travel to Bethlehem by order of the Emperor.
 - o There Mary gives birth in a manger because there is a no room in the inn.
 - o Heavenly lights flood the earth, angels announce the good news.
 - o Shepherds leave the fields and their flocks to come and see the new born baby.
 - o Every one is praising God.
- To many of us that is the extent of the Christmas story
- It ends with the birth of the baby.

II - But there is another part of the story that we do not often hear or tell.

It is the part of the story when the angels stop singing and go back into heaven and shepherds return to the fields.

Mary and Joseph gather their things, pick up baby Jesus, and travel back to Nazareth.

This part of the Christmas story is often left untold.

It is the part when everything looks like it did before the birth;

- When the manger is again empty.
- The night sky is again dark and silent and.
- The shepherds are again living in the fields keeping watch over the fields.

That does not mean the end of Christmas.

It is rather, the beginning.

Christmas begins when we quit talking about the story and allow our lives to become the story. It is you and me to tell the untold story of Christmas – your testimony.

Theme: “GOOD NEWS TO ALL THE PEOPLE (THE UNTOLD STORY OF CHRISTMAS)”

- Before we look at the untold part of the Christmas story
- Let us look at one of the characters that can help us see

III – HOW DID THINGS LOOKED LIKE BEFORE THE BIRTH

LUKE 2:1-3 – CAESAR AUGUSTUS

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was the governor of Syria. And Everyone went to his own town to register.

LOTS OF NEW TAXES

It says in these verses 1 and 3 that he made a decree for everyone to go to his home town to be registered.

The Romans would call census for two reasons.

- i. For compulsory military service
- ii. For taxation purposes

He wanted to know how many people were/are in the empire so that he is/was in position to know how much to tax each one of them.

The difference between Caesar Augustus and modern presidents is that Caesar was not elected by the people and he did not have term limits.

He was like a king and as an emperor he could do whatever he wanted.

He wanted to tax people, and in order to do that, he needed them registered through a census.

You would like to hear this that Caesar Augustus, his real name was Gaius Octavius.

He was an adopted son of Julius Caesar, and when Julius Caesar died, Octavius became emperor, and he took on the title of the position – Caesar.

With this title (Caesar) he could have been called or know as Octavius Caesar.

However, Octavius was a very proud and arrogant man.

He wanted to be greater than any other Caesar before him.

And with the approval of the Roman Supreme Council, he dropped his name Octavius and added Augustus.

Augustus means “MAJESTY”

This name carries the idea of being a god. Caesar Augustus means Caesar God.

He was proclaiming himself to be god. King of kings. Prince of peace.

That is part of the reason he taxed the people so heavily.

As a god, he thought he needed to live in luxury and ease, and that people, his subjects should pay for his luxuries – that is why he taxed them.

He did not care how his heavy taxes placed financial burdens on the people.

He did not care that his method of registration caused great disruption in the lives of his subjects.

He did not care that by forcing people to return to their home town to be registered, he was forcing them to go on long journeys which proved to be expensive for them.

He did not care if people were sick.

He did not care if people were old.

It did not matter to him if his people were greatly inconvenience by his decree, he just wanted money.

He did whatever he wanted, and if people did not like it, that was too bad.

If they tried to rebel, he had his vast army to deal with the defiants - he brutally murdered any perceived enemies. i.e Idi Amin.

True peace did not come through Augustus as people hoped.

But Mary and Joseph submitted even though it made their lives miserable even though they ran into many troubles. Under his rule, he and Rome was built more glorious than before with Temples, Arenas, and public steam bath.

IV. LUKE 2:4-7 You can see/read the troubles they experienced.

- They went out of the city of Nazareth in Galilee, into Judea, to the city of David, called Bethlehem.
- From Nazareth to Bethlehem is a trip of about 80 miles.
- It took them several days and Mary was nine months pregnant.
- We are told Joseph belonged to the house and line of David.
- I believe many of us want to be descendants of famous persons.
- Coming from the line of the great King David did not help him either.
- He was pushed around by this pagan selfish Caesar.
- If Joseph lived today, he could have demanded his rights.
- May be he could have passed around a petition for people to sign.
- He could have demonstrated and went on a hunger strike.
- May be could have passed around a picture of his wife nine months pregnant and demanded how Caesar could make a woman in her condition travel 80 miles just to be taxed.
- And to make things worse after travelling for 80 miles there was no room them in the inn.

- How many of you ladies when you are nine months pregnant, want to go on a 80 miles journey which takes several days, and at the end of it; no warm water to bathe, no hot meal, no comfortable bed but grass/ hay in a barn and you share this with a few cows and a horse.

V. Does what Joseph and Mary went through during the reign of Caesar Augustus sound familiar.

- Despite all the troubles and challenges there is good news in the untold story of Christmas.
- Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.
- we need to hear and trust that other part of the story.
 - o it tells us that the miracle of Christmas is not the virgin birth.
 - o it is not the heavenly light.
 - o it is not the angelic appearances or
 - o Songs of heavenly hosts.
- the miracle of Christmas is in you.
 - o The invisible God is now seen in a human face – Do you look at people with compassion? Jesus wants to be born in the way you look at others.
 - o The eternal word is now spoken by a human tongue. Do you speak to people words of encouragement or you use your tongue to spit fire.
 - o The sacred touch is now given by human hands. What do you use your hands for? He wants to be born in your hands.
 - Yours is the face.
 - Yours is the tongue.
 - Yours is the hands.
- The glorious exchange of gifts has been completed in the birth of Jesus.
- God has given us divinity and we have given God humanity.

As you have heard St. Luke tells us that all of this happened in the most ordinary places and circumstances. It can as well happen in your circumstances.

It happened even as government ordered a census and taxation.

It can still happen when parliament changes the constitution and removes the age limit and amendments.

It happened in the midst of travels, crowds and overbooked hotels / inns

It happened in the darkness and fear of an unknown future. Where you cannot tell what God has in store for you in the coming year 2018.

It happens with the birth of a baby.

It happens while working the night shift.

Jesus' birth did not take the shepherds out of the fields or away from the sheep.

Before Jesus was born, they were shepherds living in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night.

After Jesus was born they were shepherds living in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night.

Jesus' birth does not allow us to escape the reality of our life and world.

It is just the opposite.

Jesus is born into the circumstances of our life and world.

There is no place you go or circumstance you encounter in which Jesus is not being born.

Look at your life.

What do you see?

Name the reality, whatever it might be, because that is a place in which Jesus is being born, a place where God's divinity meets your humanity.

He is born in the joys, celebration and thanksgiving of your life.

He is born in the sorrow, losses, and griefs of your life.

He is born in times of hopes and fears in your words and in your silence.

He is born in your successes and accomplishments as well as your failure and disappointment.

The salvation of God's presence, love and healing fills every aspect of your life.

Let the angels depart and shepherds return to the fields.

Let the sky become dark and silent.

Let the holy family go home

Let Christmas become real.

The manger of his birth is not in Bethlehem.

Your life is the manger of Jesus' birth despite the troubles, challenges, sorrows you go through/experience and that, as the angel says, is "good news of great joy"

Jesus is willing and he desires to be born in the experiences of your life.

He wants and can be born in your trouble, in your sorrows in your joys and disappointments.

Some people say they will receive him when things improve in life – continue to be worse.

Merry Christmas.

Happy New Year.