

Hope Fulfilled

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Luke 2:1-20

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December 24, 2020 (Xmas Eve)

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Doug: We all live in the same world, but we understand that world differently. Not all of the assumptions that any one of us make about the world are really how the world is. This Christmas Eve, God has some things to say, speaking as the Creator of the world, about how this world really is.

Let's start with a big one. "It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss."

**Pam: This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.<sup>1</sup>**

Doug: There's always been a temptation to nihilism, the idea that life is meaningless, or that what's wrong in the world is so big that we can't possibly do anything about it. So why bother.

Well, God made this world and everyone and everything in it. God loves this world and all that is in it so much, that God came down here Godself at the first Christmas to save it all, including us.

We don't have to save the whole world ourselves – God's doing that. We just need to do our part. God's power to save is not limited by our ability, or even by our willingness to help. That means that "It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction."

**Pam: This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.<sup>2</sup>**

Doug: Yes, some people survive being treated like they are not people. Some don't.

Some people survive being discriminated against. Some don't.

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>2</sup> John 10:10.

Some survive hunger and poverty. Some don't.

But, even if they do, that's not LIVING – that's just SURVIVING. Human beings are supposed to be able to LIVE. Just like we want good things for all our kids, that's what God wants for all of God's children.

If people are going to really LIVE, then "It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever."

**Pam: This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful Counsellor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.<sup>3</sup>**

Doug: I know that violence and hatred seem to be never-ending. If you turn on the television, the news is full of reports of shootings, stabbings, and the abuse of innocent people. Even sincere, heartfelt peaceful protests against violence are cynically hijacked by evil people who want to incite violence.

However, things are getting better. You wouldn't guess it from the news or from certain politicians' rhetoric, but violent crime in America has actually been going down since its peak in the early 1990's.<sup>4</sup> Remember, scared people are easy to manipulate. Whether that fear is justified or not.

The most common command in the whole Bible is "Do not be afraid."

Unfortunately, it's the least often obeyed, because fear is a power in and of itself. Some amount of fear keeps us from doing stupid things, but a lot of

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 9:6

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime_in_the_United_States)

the fear that's out there is not justified. "It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world."

**Pam: This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, ...and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.<sup>5</sup>**

Doug: Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. If we are following him, then we are acting under his authority. That means that you don't have to have "Reverend" or "Doctor" in front of your name to say, "Exploiting the poor is wrong." You don't have to have a Ph.D. to say that peace is better than violence, and justice better than rule by fear. You don't have to be an expert to say that all God's children should have enough to eat, and a safe place to lay their head.

And, if we are following Jesus, we never walk alone. So "Hold your head up high / And don't be afraid of the dark."<sup>6</sup>

"It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church, before we can be peacemakers."

**Pam: This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall have dreams.<sup>7</sup>**

Doug: God's vision for the world is for everybody! It is no secret. God has told us clearly what it is. God's vision for the world involves throwing tyrants down

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>6</sup> Rogers and Hammerstein, *You'll Never Walk Alone*, originally sung in the musical *Carousel* (1945), though my personal favorite version is the cover by the Dropkick Murphys.

<sup>7</sup> Joel 2:28

from their thrones, filling the poor with good things and sending the rich away empty.<sup>8</sup> God's vision for the world includes the wolf lying down with the lamb, and the toddler playing over the asp's nest. "They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord..."<sup>9</sup>

This isn't some silly pipe dream. This is God's vision for the world, expressed through God's prophets. It is happening. In the long run, God gets what God wants. That means that "It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity, and of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history."

**Pam: This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshippers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.<sup>10</sup>**

Doug: God loves the world, including us. God loves the world so much that God came down here, was born, lived, died, and was resurrected for the world, to save us from sin and death. God's world is slowly getting better. God's vision for the world is getting closer. Not in some far off place, but right here on Earth.

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 1: 46-55.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 11:6,8-9.

<sup>10</sup> John 4:23.

"So let us enter Christmas in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ—the life of the world."<sup>11</sup>

And let's live our lives so that everyone can see that vision and that affirmation in all that we say and do.

Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> The Christmas Credo is adapted from one written by Fr. Daniel Berrigan, S.J. published in *Testimony: The Word Made Flesh* (2004).