

Unfolding the Word

Advent

1 Corinthians 13 – A Christmas Version

If I decorate my house perfectly with bows, and twinkling lights and shiny balls, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another decorator.

If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cakes, preparing fancy meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another cook.

If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love to my family, it profits me nothing.

If I trim the tree with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend lots of holiday parties and sing in the choir but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point.

Love stops the cooking to hug the child. Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the spouse. Love is kind, even when tired. Love doesn't envy another's home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.

Love doesn't yell at the kids to get out of the way. Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return but rejoices in giving to those who can't.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. Video games will break, pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust, but giving the gift of LOVE will endure.



Notes: Luke 2: 1-20

Bethlehem was the 'city of David', i.e. the traditional hometown of King David and his descendents. For the census, every family had to be registered in their family hometown. Therefore, Mary and Joseph had to come from Nazareth to Bethlehem as Joseph was David's descendent. We are not told about Mary but in Jewish law the child would follow the father's line and Joseph was considered to be Jesus' father. The Old Testament prophecies had foretold that the Messiah (Saviour) would come from David's line and that he would be born in Bethlehem. While in Bethlehem for the census, Mary gave birth to Jesus

In Luke's gospel he is constantly telling us that salvation is here NOW not in the future. It is here now because the incarnation has happened, Jesus is born, our Saviour now lives among us (Luke 1:11)

Jesus' birth will bring peace – more lasting than that brought by Caesar Augustus. (1:19)

So many times when we hear about Mary we hear about her 'pondering' or 'reflecting on' the things that are happening. In other words she is turning them over in her mind, trying to see their relevance for her. Luke is setting Mary as an example for us of someone who 'heard the word of God and lived accordingly.' She is often described as the ideal disciple. See also Lk 2: 51, 8: 19-21; 11: 27-29 and Acts 1: 14).

The people who are present in the stable are all poor, marginalised, disadvantaged. Mary and Joseph are poor. They could be considered homeless people in this story.

They have to stay in a shed for animals.

The shepherds were considered unclean by people like the Pharisees because they spent their time caring for animals. They didn't perform the ritual washing before meals. They didn't go to the temple for prayers or sacrifice. They were considered outsiders. Yet they are the examples of model followers/disciples – because they heard the 'good news', believed it, and reacted by 'glorifying and praising God'.

This reminds us once again of Mary's Magnificat where she says that "he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly"

There is also a huge contrast between the angelic choir and the poverty surrounding the child who is born in the stable. This is also to show that God's values are very different to earthly values.

The angels describe Jesus as saviour (who brings salvation to all), messiah (the anointed one) and Lord (a name which is also used for God in the Old Testament).

Something to think about:

Does the threefold description of the infant Jesus ("wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn") remind us of the threefold description of Jesus' death? ("wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid"). Even at this stage is Luke telling us what will happen to this baby?