

Sermon Christmas Day Sunday 2022

May I praise simplicity on this Christmas morning?

Jesus was born to a very young mother in a poor family. Maybe they were used to the stink of stables - I'm not - but it certainly is an unhygienic place to give birth. Churches still want to build great cathedrals, but the lessons of Jesus come from the hard places and lives of the poor.

Just before the pandemic, I was blessed to visit South Africa and Israel. In South Africa, at the request of a Pearson College student from Swaziland, now named Eswatini, we took soccer shoes and a Bayern Munich jersey to his brother and family. There was no driveway, so we bounced our car part way across a field and then walked to come to their house. What excitement - especially since they didn't expect us until the next day!

His mom was active in their Anglican church, and if it had been Sunday, would take us there. I promised that, if I could, I would return someday, and we would go together. That promise still glows inside me.

As we spoke, us by our ignorance forcing them to use English, I thought if Jesus were born today, and not necessarily a Jew, it would probably be to a family in a place like Eswatini - far from the imperial centres of Washington, London and Beijing, or Rome then, far even from the regional big cities, Johannesburg and Cape Town, or Jerusalem and Damascus then.

The celebration of the angels for the birth of Jesus was over a pasture of cropped grass and scattered sheep poop, on a nameless hill, near a little village that no one in the imperial centres had ever heard of. And, it was cold.

Now the Bethlehem field is surrounded by a wall. In February meadow flowers were small and lovely. Within the wall is a fine church and

walkways. But God did not send the angels to the Temple then, and probably wouldn't send them to a fine church today.

Today, that nameless field might be in Eswatini, a country many of us have never heard of, and I am probably mis-pronouncing.

God does not flow from on high through the great palaces of commerce, government and church to the lowly people. God bursts out everywhere, surprises everyone. How many prophets were kings and princes? Certainly not John the Baptist.

So prize simplicity. Simplicity is sparkling clear air. Wealth and busyness are a fog. When we see clearly, life unfolds with grace. We, like Mary, will ponder and treasure these things in our heart.

And we celebrate with a simple, heart-felt smile and "Merry Christmas!"

