

The Bible, whether Jewish or Christian scripture, speaks of a time long ago! The job of a preacher, and all serious about their faith, is to discern what is everlasting, and what is relevant to our own time. When we draw connections between the Jewish and Christian writings, we can discover what is everlasting, and true across all cultures.

So in today's readings, the prophet Micah, the last book of what Christians have traditionally called the "*Old Testament*," mentions **Bethlehem** as the place where a new ruler will come forth... notice it is not from Jerusalem, the central city, but from a small town... and as the prophecy comes true, we hear later, that this new peaceful ruler from Bethlehem was born in a barn, in a stable, born to poor folk named Mary and Joseph. So "O Little Town of Bethlehem" sets the scene, with the everlasting truth: that the Spirit of God comes to us in unexpected, often small ways!

How about those **shepherds**, "keeping watch over their flocks by night?" We don't have many shepherds in our culture, but the thing that is everlasting, the spiritual thing, is that shepherds are vigilant, dedicated to caring for their sheep. Shepherds are also in the prophecy by Micah, that the new ruler in Israel will "*feed his flock* in the strength of the Lord." And Jesus birth took place where there were shepherds nearby... people who cared deeply for their animals. The divine spirit of good shepherding cares for Creation and all creatures... which teaches us to care more for each other! In some larger churches, people offer to be "shepherds" for newcomers; we

do it more informally here, but we know that anyone new to any community needs someone to welcome them, show them around, give some orientation. It's a great exercise to pause and remember special people in our lives who were teachers, mentors, shepherds... who truly cared for us!

How about those **angels** singing? We might not hear voices coming from the clouds (!), but it is good to remember that the birth of Jesus, and any special birth often happens with Singing! Maybe Mary and Joseph and the shepherds all new a little birthday song, not just "Happy Birthday to you," but one instigated by angels, "Glory to God in the Highest" as if to say this is indeed a spectacular birth. Mary survived a long trip and giving birth in a stable. Good things happen with song... We love more music at Christmastime... A group is going Caroling after church... and there are concerts everywhere, including the Choral Society this afternoon at Nock Middle School! Spirit and Music go hand in hand; Music can lift our spirit, music can save and heal!

What about the **King Herod** part of the story? Who let *him* into our pageant this morning? Churches have often read only the story in Luke, just the part about angels and shepherds and the babe in a manger! But every once in awhile, or maybe *after* Christmas, preachers will risk mentioning the wicked King Herod! He said, search for the child, so I can also come and "worship" him (Ha Ha). Mary and Joseph, led by a dream, fled to Egypt, while Herod was sending soldiers to Bethlehem to kill all male babies. He wanted to kill off any opposition, any

challenge to his rule. Any relevance for modern day? Are there any government leaders, near or far, who do their best to destroy all opposition? I'll let you ponder that one.

And who were the **wise men**, then and now? The wise men were the ones who did not listen to that fearful tyrant King Herod! He told them, perhaps ordered them, to come back with news of where the child was. But in a dream, some angelic voices said don't go back to Herod! Go home by a different route; Start a resistance movement to resist the oppressive rulers! Resist those who are tyrants, who stay in power by destroying any opposition. The newborn King you found is a Prince of *Peace*, who will be like a shepherd who *feeds* his flock, makes peace on earth, with good will towards all.

What about **the star** in the east? Some speculate that there was an unusual convergence of planets at that time. Or perhaps it was a comet... "with a tail as big as a kite" as one song says. I think I'll leave astral speculation up to the scientists or to astrologers, who may indeed have been what the wise men were! But I do find a connection, for all time, that the truth of outer space will always be a bit beyond our reach, even beyond our best scientists. I remember as a kid, I used to lie on a frozen pond and look at the night sky, trying to find the big and little dipper, and wondering about all the other little stars or planets out there. There will always be a mystery to Creation. But the stars and the sun are Light, and the miracle of Creation is that in the beginning there was Light, there was *creative energy*. Light, as a metaphor, means truth and understanding...

as in “Can you shed some light on this?” So the Christmas star, or the stars on a clear night can remind us to seek truth, to seek reasons and understanding in our dark times.

And in the old story, finally, of course, the **babe in a manger**, the newborn King. Who would not agree that a newborn babe is king of the household, runs the show, is the center of attention, now regulates all the schedules. The newborn is not only center of attention, but is clearly a miracle of creation and growth... Who teaches the babe to grab and hold on to your finger? Who gives the babe its first smile or laugh? How does milk translate into muscles and nerves that allow a babe to crawl, or stand up? Babies are nothing short of mystery and miracle! Jesus went through growing pains, tears and laughter, like any baby! And the fact that Jesus, the Christ, the anointed one, came to the world as a baby... tells us that we can find divinity, beautiful spirit, as we grow, in all our stages of life.

At Christmastime we are reminded to share God's:  
Music of the angels, with laughter and joy  
Shepherding of the shepherds, with care and compassion  
Wisdom of the wise men, that true power is not domination  
Vulnerability and growth, like the babe of Bethlehem  
Light and truth, symbolized by stars and candles;  
Lord Jesus, “Guide us to your perfect light.” Amen.