

Advent 2A - December 2019

### The King Is Coming

Can you imagine complete silence? It's hard to in our culture today in which televisions, radios, etc. are constantly blaring. But in this morning's text a silence of 400 years is broken. Don't misunderstand me, not everyone was silent during this period. Women and men were talking.. Boys and girls were talking. But there was no prophet speaking the Word of the LORD. No one was truthfully saying, "Thus says the LORD..."

In reality two silences are broken in this morning's text. For one, the 400 year period without a Word from God and for another, a gap of approximately 30 years in the life of Jesus. Matthew skips directly from his birth and infancy narrative to an event that occurs approximately 30 years later: the ministry of John the Baptist. Both of these silences are broken by the sound of a voice.

The voice which breaks the silence is the voice of John the Baptist, who may rightly be called the last of the Old Testament Prophets. He is functioning as a Herald by announcing the coming of the King. In the ancient world, a herald was one who went ahead of a king's chariot to prepare the road. He would command a crew which would smooth out the usually rough roads of that day by filling potholes and removing boulders. The herald would also go before the king shouting, "Make way, the King is coming!" (Robert Mounce, Matthew NIBC, 23). This was the function of John the Baptist. (by Steve Weaver from *The Herald of the King*)

### Are You Swapping Heaven?

The great old evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, used to tell a legend about a beautiful swan that alighted one day by the banks of the water in which a crane was wading about seeking snails. For a few moments the crane viewed the swan in stupid wonder and then inquired: "Where do you come from?" "I come from heaven!" replied the swan. "And where is heaven?" asked the crane. "Heaven!" said the swan, "Heaven! have you never heard of heaven?" And the beautiful bird went on to describe the grandeur of the Eternal City. She told of streets of gold, and the gates and walls made of precious stones; of the river of life, pure as crystal, upon whose banks is the tree whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations. In eloquent terms the swan

sought to describe the hosts who live in the other world, but without arousing the slightest interest on the part of the crane. Finally the crane asked: "Are there any snails there?" "Snails!" repeated the swan, "No! Of course there are not."

"Then," said the crane, as it continued its search along the slimy banks of the pool, "you can have your heaven. I want snails!" "This fable," said Moody, "has a deep truth underlying it. How many a young person to whom God has granted the advantages of a Christian home, has turned his back upon it and searched for snails!

How many a man will sacrifice his wife, his family, his all, for the snails of sin!

How many a girl has deliberately turned from the love of parents and home to learn too late that heaven has been forfeited for snails!"

Moody spoke those words a century ago, but people are still swapping heaven for snails. How about you? John the Baptist's words are for each of us: Are there some changes that need to be made in your life? (adapted by King Duncan from Moody's Anecdotes, Page 125-126)

### We Need John

When our children were small, a nice church lady named Chris made them a child-friendly crèche. All the actors in this stable drama are soft and squishy and durable - perfect to touch and rearrange - or toss across the living room in a fit of toddler frenzy. The Joseph character has always been my favorite because he looks a little wild - red yarn spiking out from his head, giving him an odd look of energy.

In fact, I have renamed this character John the Baptist and in my mind substituted one of the innocuous shepherds for the more staid and solid Joseph. Why this invention? Because, over the years, I have decided that without the disconcerting presence of John lurking in the shadows of our manger scenes, the Jesus story is mush - nothing but child's play, lulling us into sleepy sentimentality. (by Susan R. Andrews from *Sermons for Sundays: In Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany: The Offense of Grace*, CSS Publishing Company